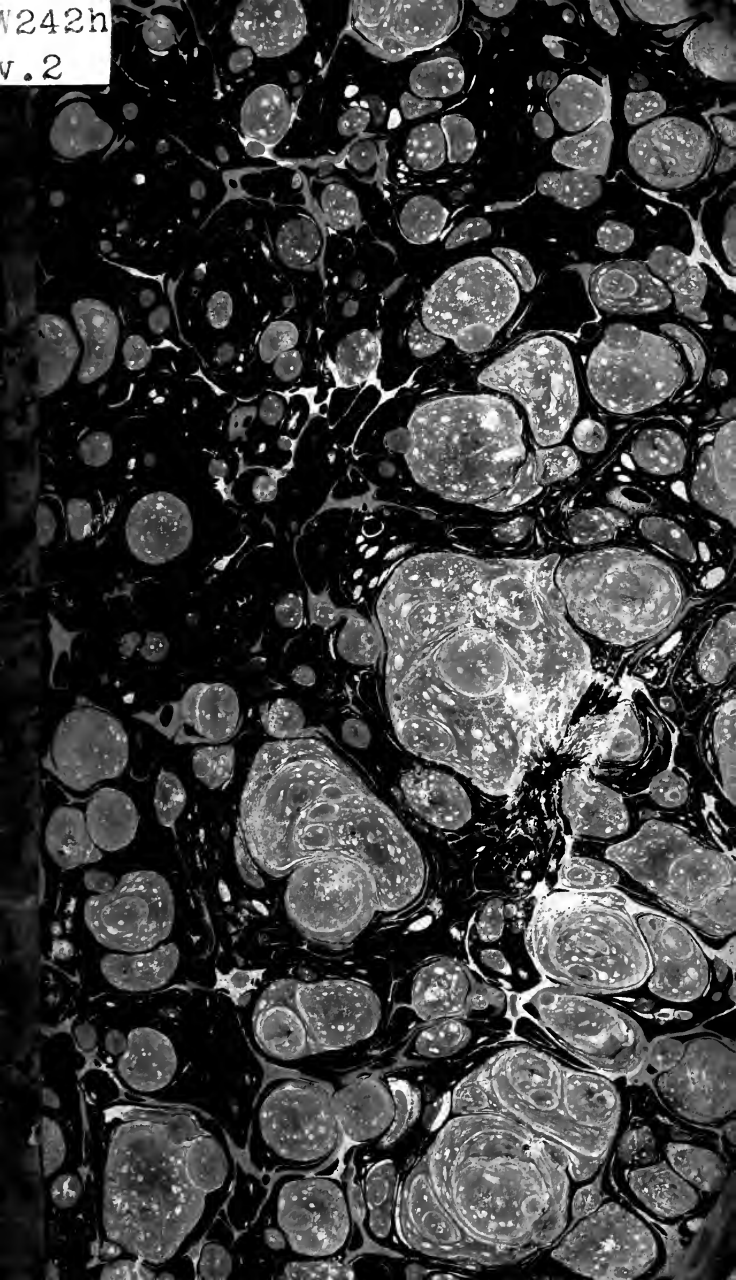
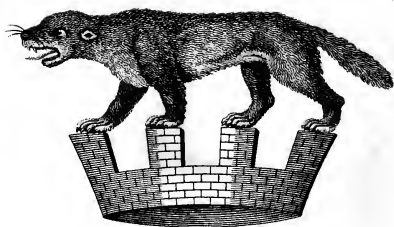
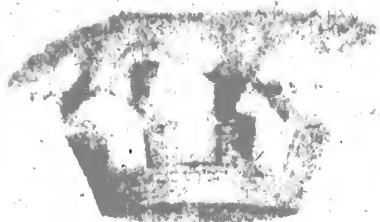


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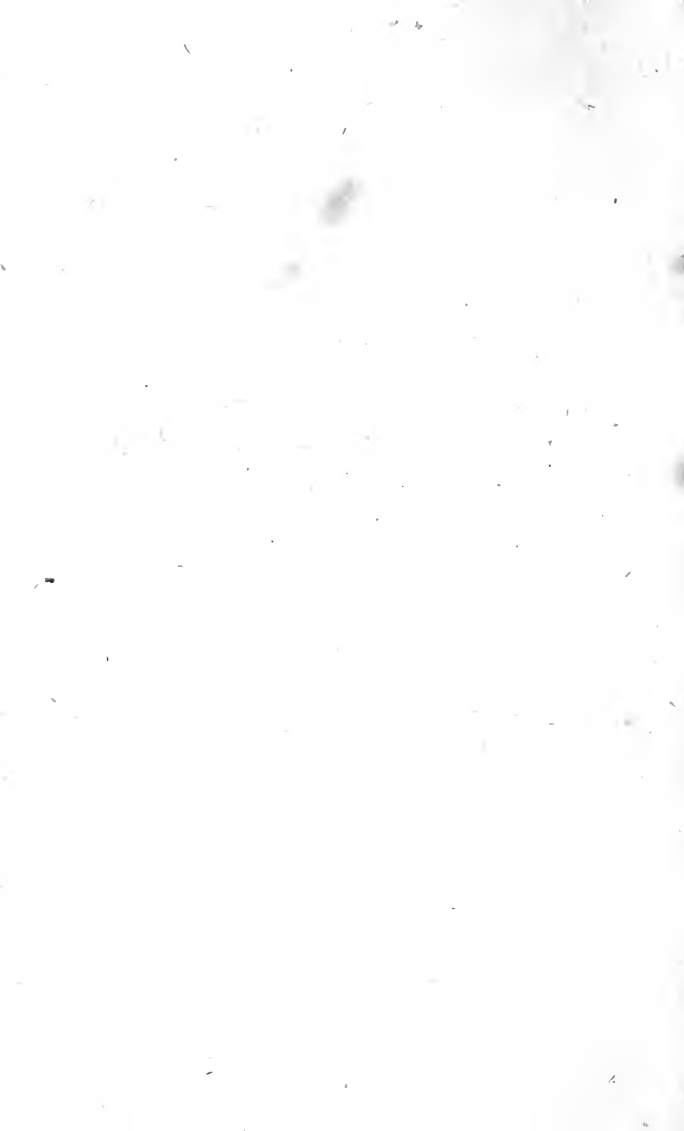
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HERBERT LODGE;

A

NEW-FOREST STORY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

MISS WARNER,

OF BATH.

VOL. II.

“ Know, we are bound to cast the minds of youth
“ Betimes into the mould of heavenly truth,
“ That taught of God, they may indeed be wise,
“ Nor, ignorantly wandering, miss the skies.”

COWPER.

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1808.



HERBERT-LODGE.



CHAPTER I.

“ **W**HEN awakened from insensibility to life and sense, I found myself stretched upon a bed, in a strange apartment, suffering the most agonizing pain, and only retaining an indistinct remembrance of the horrors that were passed.

“ By the side of the bed I beheld a decent looking woman employed in knitting, who answered my impatient enquiries by informing me, “ that I

had been conveyed to her cottage on the preceding evening; that the man who brought me told her he had discovered me by the side of the road, murdered as he supposed, though my purse was untouched, and my watch in my pocket; that finding I still breathed when he brought me to her house, he said he would go to the adjoining town, and fetch a surgeon to my assistance; that the medical gentleman had been there, extracted a ball from my shoulder, and poured a composing draught down my throat, which had thrown me into a sweet sleep; but that the man who conveyed me thither, had returned no more. ‘And now, sir,’ she added, ‘seeing as how you have recovered your senses, you will be pleased to tell me, mayhap, where I may send to your friends, or your *wife*, if you have one, who would be mainly troubled, if she knew how mortal bad you were.’

“ The poor woman had undesignedly struck a chord that vibrated to the very core of my heart.

“ ‘ Wife!’ I repeated, staring wildly round ; ‘ Ah, where is she? where is the dearest treasure of my soul; my sweet, my gentle Adelaide?’ making at the same time a violent but useless effort to rise in my bed.

“ My attendant seemed greatly alarmed at the vehemence of my manner, and incoherence of my language, and told the surgeon, who at that moment arrived, ‘ she believed that the poor gentleman had not yet recovered his wits.’

“ Mr. ——— took no notice of her remark, but drawing near my bed, and feeling my pulse, congratulated me on the good effects of his own skill and medicines, asked a few questions, and proceeded to examine my wound.

“ ‘ A pistol ball,’ he said, ‘ had passed through my arm and breast ; and though

he did not believe the injury would be mortal, yet he assured me all his endeavours to effect a cure would be unavailing, unless I assisted them by endeavouring to compose my agitated spirits."

"Whilst he was speaking, a horrible idea crossed my fancy, and with wild impatience I demanded of him, "whether, if any one had been supported within my wounded arm, that person would have been *injured* by the ball that was lodged in my breast?"

" '*Injured*, sir,' replied he, with a look that expressed a doubt of my having recovered my senses; 'injured with a vengeance, I believe. Man, woman, or child, the person is now as dead as a stone; for the ball could not have reached your breast but through his or her body.'"

"He continued speaking, Caroline, but his additional words conveyed no meaning to my mind. 'The ball could

not have reached your breast, but thro' *her* body.' This sentence alone rang in my ears, and occupied all my imagination. It represented to me my Adelaide sinking from my grasp, bleeding and expiring under the stroke that unnerved the supporting arm of her husband!—My wife and promised offspring writhing with the agonies inflicted by a murderer's hand; or cold and lifeless weltering in their blood!

“The idea was too horrible for reason long to struggle with; my brain was inflamed to madness, and a raging delirium destroyed for a time the agonizing recollection of my woes.

“In this state of mental derangement I lay for some weeks; but at length by the kind care of the good woman of the house, the attention of my medical friend, and the aid of a naturally-strong constitution, I gradually recovered; my bodily disorders began to disappear, my

mind recovered its powers, and a certain degree of tranquillity returned to me ; though the composure of my spirits was rather the stillness of despair, than the sweet calm of resignation.

“ I brooded over my sorrows in sullen silence, and dwelt with gloomy pleasure on the sad particulars of my fate, for the horrid purpose of confirming in my bosom schemes of dire revenge.

“ It was now clear to my mind, that Vincent had abused the confidence I so rashly had placed in him, and betrayed me to my brother and the Marquis, who had concerted with him the plan of intercepting and carrying off my Adelaide ; but that meeting with a resistance which they did not expect, they had, in their endeavour to effect their purpose, committed the horrible deeds I have described.

“ Yes, I will acknowledge to my sister, that the idea of offering up the ruthless

wretches, as victims to my slaughtered wife, was a cordial to my soul. Every holy precept and mild instruction of that departed saint, our honoured mother, was banished from my mind. My imagination rioted on fancied scenes of blood, and the first use which I resolved to make of my returning strength, (pardon me, Heaven! the dire determination,) was to sacrifice the fiends who had murdered my Adelaide.

“ But, blessed be the Providence which spared me this inexpressible guilt; and brought me, by still further trials, to an acquiescence in his holy will.

“ One evening, as I was sitting at the little window of my humble abode, feasting on the dark designs of my wounded spirit, I saw a man approach the door, who, notwithstanding it was quite dusk, and his being muffled up in a great coat, I knew immediately to be Vincent.

“To describe my emotions at this horrible vision, would be impossible. The most savage fury filled my soul; and rushing from the room, I sprang upon him with a tiger’s rage; exclaiming in a tone scarcely human, ‘Have I again found you, thou damned betrayer of my confidence, thou infernal destroyer of my peace? Ah! where is my wife; my Adelaide; my murdered saint?’

“At the same time I attempted to tear him to the ground. But, alas, weakened by a long confinement, I was no match for the athletic ruffian; who, after a short struggle, threw me on my back, and placed his knee upon my breast.

“In a moment the passage was filled with men, one of whom introduced a gag into my mouth, whilst a second secured my hands with a rope.

“But, Heavens! what sketch of fancy can for an instant comprehend my sen-

sations, when I heard the voice of Fitzmordaunt order the chaise to draw up, and at the same time assure the poor woman of the house, who stood trembling with surprize, that I was ‘an highwayman and a murderer, whom he and his assistants were authorized to apprehend and convey to the county gaol.’

“ I gave an involuntary shriek at the petrifying sound that assailed my ear; a dizziness seized my brain, darkness veiled my eyes, and death appeared to have at length commiserated and ended all my sorrows.

“ But, alás, my sister, I was doomed to further suffering. After a long stupefaction, sense again returned; and I perceived that I was in a post-chaise, gagged and bound, between two men, whose persons were entirely unknown to me, and who preserved a gloomy silence, except when with bitter imprecations

they ordered the driver to quicken his pace.

“ It was now night, and the darkness in which we were involved, and the wind that roared around us, seemed but too faithfully to correspond with my dismal and mysterious fate.

“ After a rapid journey of some hours, the sound of the rolling surge announced to me that we approached the sea-shore. In a few minutes I was taken from the chaise, and put on board a boat, accompanied by my conductors, which shortly brought us to a vessel lying in the offing.

“ I cannot pretend to detail to you, Caroline, the circumstances of our embarkation, nor the occurrences of several subsequent weeks.

“ Bodily weakness and agony of heart seemed to have made a desert of my mind, and no distinct ideas were impressed upon it for a considerable time.

“The gentle influence of a tropical climate, however, within which we had soon arrived, gradually invigorated my feeble frame ; and I became capable of making observations on the particulars of my situation.

“ I now found that I was on board a cutter, apparently calculated for hostile service, with a crew whose language and manners might reasonably have led me to suppose them inhabitants of the infernal regions, rather than beings of the same species with myself.

“ Of the wretch who commanded them I have seen no parallel. He seemed to have been raised to his superiority, merely by his pre-eminence in wickedness. Every enquiry which I put to him respecting my destination, was answered only by oaths and abuse ; and on fifty occasions he had the audacity to execrate me ‘ for not dying when I came on board, that he might have got his

reward, without the trouble of carrying a land-lubber half round the world.’

“ Though I was perfectly careless of life, and indeed longed ardently to quit its sorrows, and join my Adelaide in a happier state; yet I could not avoid feeling some curiosity to discover the meaning of those words, which this sea-monster so frequently repeated.

“ Happily his mate was not quite so far removed from humanity as himself; and of him I learned, that our vessel was a smuggling-cutter, which had been hired at a great expence to convey me to the settlement of Surinam in South-America;—that I was represented to have been a desperate and abandoned profligate, who had dishonoured his family, and committed a thousand crimes; that every measure having been tried to reclaim me, without effect, it was deemed expedient by my relations to send me to a state of servitude in a dis-

tant climate, where all possibility of my further injuring or disgracing them would be effectually prevented.

“ From this man I further learnt, that his captain, as he called the lawless ruffian who commanded, had undertaken to deliver me as a slave to a Dutch planter on the banks of the Paramaribo, unless I should die before the completion of the voyage, in which case the reward was to be the same.

“ Will you believe it, Caroline, that I received this dreadful intelligence without horror? Nay, let me rather say, I heard it with a kind of gloomy satisfaction. My mind was callous to suffering, and dwelt with a feeling that approached to pleasure, on the idea of passing the wretched remainder of my days in a climate far distant from that land where dwelt a monster so horrible to my fancy as Fitzmordaunt, who had completed his

injuries to me by this superlative instance of malice and revenge.

“ Ah ! little did I know the horrors of the state to which I was to be introduced, and in which I dragged on six long, tedious years.

“ But let me not wound your feelings, Caroline, by attempting to paint those particulars, of which all the colouring of language could give but a faint idea. It was a scene, at the contemplation of which humanity must shudder; a scene which my memory would gladly blot from its tablets for ever.

“ Not that with selfish sorrow I groaned for my own calamities alone : not that I dropped the unmanly tear for the frequent lash that tore my flesh at the capricious command of the barbarian to whom I was consigned. No : I was insensible to personal suffering. Fate had done its worst, in depriving me of

Adelaide, and no corporal infliction could reach my heart.

“ No, Caroline ; it was the affliction of my sad companions in slavery, which bade my sorrows flow. It was the wanton cruelty exercised upon these “ injured sons of Afric,” that caused my soul to sink within me.

“ Daily did I behold the harmless natives of a distant clime, who had been basely seduced, or forcibly torn from all the tender ties of country and of kindred, bleeding beneath the whip of a relentless overseer, or writhing under the still more terrible inflictions which ingenious cruelty had invented for the punishment of the most venial offences.

“ Whatever enormities uncontrouled power in the hands of the profligate and the ignorant may be supposed to commit ; whatever inhuman excesses, unrestrained passion, stimulated by intemperance, and divested by voluptuousness

of pity, may be imagined to suggest; such were daily exemplified by the unrelenting planter, and his ferocious assistant.*

“ Hourly did the surrounding woods echo to the groans and cries of the tortured slaves ; hourly were the fields of labour moistened by their tears and blood.

“ It was late in the evening, after a scene of horrible punishment inflicted upon six of the negroes for a trifling transgression, that I had crept to my wretched pallet to meditate in solitude and silence on this cursed system of oppression.

“ Active fancy sketched my former happiness, and contrasted it with my present woe; the gentle form of Ade-

* See “ STEDMAN’S Surinam ;” and alternately blush and sigh for humanity.

laide, and all the hopes of lasting joy with her, which I had fostered, passed before my imagination, and were succeeded by the recollection of the loss of my beloved, and all the dismal catalogue of ills which followed that event.

“The bloody scene of suffering innocence and triumphant villainy which I had just witnessed, recurred to my memory, and filled up the horrid canvas.

“My heart was bursting with a thousand sorrows; I seemed unable to endure my feelings; existence appeared intolerable to me; and, oh, dreadful thought! the impious idea of escaping further wretchedness by self-destruction presented itself to my mind.

“In an instant I had resolved, and seized my knife (pardon me, heaven, the deep guilt of the intention) to execute my purpose.

“As I raised it to my breast, the chamber-door burst open; a negro with

a light rushed in, and throwing from his bloody hand a letter on my bed, bade me ‘directly read it, and follow him.’

“The paper was from the overseer, and contained these words.—‘Englishman, your slavery is at an end. An hour since your master was stabbed by the negroes; and I am at present only spared for a more lingering death. Before I die, however, I am willing to do the last good deed within my power, and render some recompence for my cruelty to you. The note inclosed will make you known to my friend at Paramaribo, and procure you a safe return to your native land. Delay not your departure from this scene of blood, nor neglect to pray for the lost—VAN DORT.’

“Oh, my sister, how wonderful are the ways of Heaven! how just are its decrees, how wise its retributions!

“The punishment of these unhappy tyrants, so appropriate to the crimes,

they had committed; the sudden interruption of my purposed deed of guilt, fraught with eternal destruction and despair; the unexpected gift of freedom, where only irremediable slavery was before my eyes; these united wonders flashed a sudden conviction upon my soul, of the goodness and wisdom of that Providence, who watches over his creatures with an eye that neither slumbers nor sleeps.

“ In a moment, I felt my baseness and ingratitude in distrusting his mercy, and rebelling against his behests. Remorse smote upon my heart; contrition filled my bosom; I was an altered man. I saw in its proper light my own ignorance, guilt, and impotency; and the silent prayer for mercy and pardon, which my spirit sent up to heaven, was accompanied with a vow of future humble resignation to its unsearchable decrees.

“ The remainder of my story may be dispatched in a few words.

“ I followed the negro to the creek, where a boat was waiting to carry myself and another white man to Paramaribo. I delivered the letter to the friend of Van Dort, and in a few days embarked on board a Dutch trader for the port of London.

“ Repose from the intolerable toil of the plantation, and the kindness of the captain of our vessel, did much towards the restoration of a frame, which was now reduced to a skeleton by the usage I had received. But ah, what can cure a wounded spirit? The form of my lost angel still ever floated in my imagination ; and though I did not murmur, I could not forget.

“ After an auspicious passage we arrived in the Thames, and the ensuing day I was landed at the Temple stairs.

“ For a moment natural feeling triumphed over sorrow, and my heart bounded within me when I once more placed my foot on the soil that had given me birth. But it was a transient, treacherous joy, that only lent additional bitterness to the associations by which it was succeeded.

“ Fitzmordaunt dwelt in the city where I then was !

“ The idea was like the stroke of death, and a cold thrill ran through every vein. I seemed bewildered, and wandered from street to street, without any plan of what I should do, or any observation of what was passing around me.

“ At last, unconscious whither I had strolled, I found myself in the street where my brother lived, and was accosted by a man, whom I immediately recollected to have been my father’s butler.

“ The poor fellow expressed the utmost astonishment and joy at seeing me alive, since it had been generally understood he said, that I had long since perished abroad.

“ From him I learned that Fitzmordaunt was married, and then with his lady in France, where he generally resided. From him also I gathered a general outline of your history, my dear Caroline, since our separation. He dwelt with indignation on the worthlessness of Herbert, and with rapture on your own excellence and exemplary conduct. He told me that whilst your libertine husband rioted in selfish dissipation, you were employed in imparting happiness and comfort to all around you.

“ To your retreat I instantly resolved to fly. My sick heart panted for the consolation of that tender sympathy, whose healing balm I knew I should receive from you.

“After a slight, therefore, and in some particulars, a fictitious account of my adventures, (without which the curiosity of the old man could not be pacified) and enjoining him to secrecy on the subject of my return, I left him, and repaired without delay to the inn from whence the Southampton mail sets out.

“I reached that town early on the ensuing morning, and having procured a horse, and directions to the Lodge, I turned with a palpitating heart towards the residence of my sister, the dearest treasure that now remains on earth to the widowed heart of Henry.—You, Caroline, know the rest.”

They, and they *only*, who have been lessoned in the school of sorrow and suffering, can properly estimate the soothing power of sympathetic friendship,—that consolation which is reserved by heaven for the children of affliction:

that cordial drop poured by Providence into the cup of human woe, to correct its bitters, and prevent its effects from being deadly.

The story of Henry powerfully excited in the affectionate bosom of his sister this tender sentiment; and she mingled in sweet consolatory participation her sighs and tears with his.

Henry felt the influence of this healing balsam. He had unburthened his sorrows to a heart of kindred feelings with his own; a heart alive to his sufferings, and solicitous for his welfare; anxious to console, and willing to share his griefs.

It was not long, therefore, before this secret charm of sisterly affection had wrought a visibly favourable effect upon his mind; peace once more revisited it; and the storms of sorrow by which it had been agitated, were softened down into

the holy calm of a tranquil, pleasing melancholy.

The interesting attachment, too, of Edmund and Mary to him, contributed to his amusement and returning serenity.

Their own little pursuits seemed to be forgotten, in their desire to promote the comfort of their uncle. Upon all occasions their ready service was at his command; and in his frequent rambles thro' the Forest, they were his constant companions.

Henry was deeply affected by these artless proofs of affection; and soon loved them with a father's fondness. He dwelt with a rapture nearly equal to his sister's on their opening virtues; and contemplated with delight the fair hope of future worth, which their present dispositions promised.

A secret sympathy, however, seemed to draw his heart more particularly towards Mary, (whose history Mrs. Her-

bert had related to her brother;) whilst the regard she displayed for him, could only be equalled by the fond love which she entertained for the only mother she had ever known.

Nor was the benevolent rector of Rosewood backward in affording both consolation and advice to the unfortunate Henry.

At her brother's request, Mrs. Herbert had communicated to Dr. Fairford the particulars of his story, which immediately excited the good man's warmest interest in the sufferer's case.

From that moment, the conversations between himself and Henry were long and frequent, nor did they ever close without Mr. Fitzmordaunt feeling his mind strengthened, his piety increased, and his resignation confirmed.

It was after one of these interviews, and during an evening walk from the Rectory, whither he had accompanied

his sister, that Mrs. Herbert ventured to ask her brother, ‘ whether he had directed his attention to any plan for his future occupation in life?’

“ Your question,” returned he, “ my dear Caroline, is a very natural one; and I am happy to say, I can answer it satisfactorily.

“ When I first sought this retreat, it was with the intention of burying myself in the gloom and stillness of some lone abode in its neighbourhood, and of passing my days in silently brooding over my sorrows, or pouring them into that heart, which has since with a sisterly affection both participated and relieved them. I considered myself as a solitary being amongst mankind, useless to society; with no duties to perform on the theatre of life; and consequently, as authorised to waste my days in the manner most agreeable to my feelings.

“ But these erroneous notions are now dispersed. The excellent man from whom we are just separated, has given me new views of myself and my obligations. He has convinced me that I *have* duties to fulfil in society; that I am a being created for action, and appointed to perform a certain part amongst my fellow men; to lend my aid, small as it may be, towards the diffusion of human happiness; and the removal of that burthen of infelicity which is common to our nature.

“ He has called me to a recollection of my responsibility as a rational creature, and to the obligation imposed upon me of employing the *talent* with which I am entrusted, to the glory of the Donor, and the good of those around me.

“ Nor has our amiable friend confined his counsels to the improvement of my *heart*, and the rectifying of its mistakes alone; he has also sketched a plan for

my future *conduct*, by adopting which, I may realize the truth of his reasonings and carry his advice into execution.

“ He has clearly pointed out to me the impropriety of my remaining longer in a country, where I may be liable to meet with that villain who has blasted all my happiness, and heaped upon me such an accumulation of suffering.

“ But atrocious as the conduct of Sir Charles has been, the diabolical art and consummate caution with which he has managed it are such, as must effectually preclude all hope of legal redress, even if I were to forego my feelings, and have recourse to the laws of my country for justice or revenge.

“ Being thus prohibited from further personal intercourse with the little circle at the Lodge, which comprises all that now can interest my heart, I have determined to adopt the additional counsel of the Doctor, to quit England, and

settle in America; to join either my friend Frederick, or my maternal uncle Morton, who, you know, is fixed at Philadelphia; to draw for the purchase-money of my commission; which I have no doubt is safe in the honourable house at Calcutta where I invested it; and embark it in the way which either of those friends may think most eligible.

“Should it please Providence to direct such reverses in our family, Caroline, as might remove all obstacles to my return to England, assure yourself I will then fly with transport to spend my remaining years with my sister and her children. But if I must continue to be an exile from the country that gave me birth, we will soothe our separation from each other by a constant interchange of letters; and it will be an additional solace to my banishment, and a further spur to my industry, to think that I am acquiring the means of independence for

your little adopted daughter Mary, who, I confess, has wound herself round my heart, by a tie which never can be loosened; and who I could wish to share with Edmund and Matilda whatever I may acquire and leave behind me.

“ I know, my dear Caroline, what you would express by that cheering and intelligent look. I am aware, that you would, even yet, direct my fancy to the flatterer Hope, and bid me indulge the dear idea, that Adelaide is living, and that my enquiries after the lost partner of my soul might still be rewarded by her restoration. But, alas! my sister, there is now no ground for imagination, with all its powers of delusion, to sketch so bright a picture. Read this fatal paper, and then judge whether any possibilities exist of meeting my beloved on this side the grave.”

Saying this, Henry took from his bosom a small locket, and opening it, presented

to his sister the following paragraph from a newspaper, which he told her he had met with at the cottage whither he had been carried after the *rencontre* in the Forest.

‘ On Thursday evening last, as a gentleman and his lady were passing through ——— lane, in a post-chaise, they were stopped by three highwaymen, one of whom, on a slight resistance being made by the gentleman, discharged a pistol at his head, the ball of which, having passed through the body of the lady, entered the shoulder of her companion. The former was killed upon the spot, and the latter, we hear, has since expired. The strictest search is making for the perpetrator of this horrid murder.’

The perusal of this mournful piece of intelligence at once quenched every fond hope which Mrs. Herbert had indulged on this subject; but suppressing

as well as she was able the emotion she felt, ‘ My dearest Henry,’ she replied, ‘ I will not now attempt to offer any objection to your purposed plan, or oppose your quitting that country where your sufferings have been so great.

‘ Whatever dreams my fancy might have formed of happiness and success from a diligent search after Adelaide, they are now dispersed; and nothing remains for my beloved brother but a calm resignation to the will of that Being, whose every dispensation flows from wisdom and mercy, and therefore must eventually be salutary and beneficial.

‘ Had it pleased Him to have continued to me the comfort of your society, my earliest, dearest friend, I should have received the blessing with the liveliest gratitude. It would have blunted the poignancy of many a solitary sorrow,

and been a cordial to a heart, that is too often wounded in its tenderest part.

‘ But I submit without a murmur to his decree; and only bless his name for the good He has bestowed in the unexpected restoration of a brother, whom I had long despaired of ever meeting more.

‘ Yes, my dear Henry, I am now reconciled to your departure; pursue your projected plan, and may that Providence which has hitherto protected and supported you, continue to be your guard and consolation.

‘ We still may hold a frequent though distant intercourse; nor will it be giving too free a rein to imagination, to foster the hope, that heaven may again indulge us with another meeting. Oh! may it be more permanent than that which now must cease.’

But however necessary the adoption of this measure might be, and fair as the

prospects were of his success in the plan he was now entering on, yet it required all the fortitude of which Henry was possessed, to carry it into execution.

His widowed heart had felt a solace since his residence at the Lodge, to which for years before it had been an utter stranger; new affections had arisen in his bosom; he owned a parent's love for Mary and her companions, and the thought of tearing himself away from ties like these, the only springs from whence he now could taste a joy, was almost overwhelming.

Nor did the last adieu excite less painful emotions in the breasts of those whom Henry left behind.

Tears and sobs at once expressed and relieved the children's grief; whilst Mrs. Herbert, whose distressing task it was to assume a tranquillity which she could not feel, suffered all the agony of smothered sorrow. But the claims of duty

were paramount to every thing else in the mind of this exemplary woman. It was these which supported her under the pains of the parting scene with her brother; and strengthened her to comfort the children, when they had lost their affectionate friend. It was these which soon enabled her to resume all her customary employments; and, after a short time, to convert the Lodge from the house of mourning into the residence of cheerfulness and peace.

CHAPTER II.

HERBERT-LODGE, though situated in the bosom of the New-Forest, was neither a gloomy nor a solitary residence.

Built in the reign of the fourth Edward, it wore indeed an air of antique grandeur; but as later possessors had thinned the aged oaks which before completely embosomed it, its appearance was rather venerable than solemn; and though it still retained the dignity of a baronial mansion, it possessed at the

same time the airy cheerfulness of more modern residences.

The declivity of a swelling hill had been chosen by the architect as a situation at once healthy and beautiful.

Its front, which was fanned by the fresh breezes of the west, commanded a view of considerable extent. Towards *that* point, the horizon was bounded by the undulating high lands of the Isle of Wight, and the sea which washed its eastern shores.

A varied scene of towns and villages, cultivated lands, and wild commons, filled up the intermediate distance; whilst the nearer view was composed of solemn woods of antique oak, an ocean of foliage, over which the eye roved uninterruptedly for the space of three or four miles, and at length reposed itself still closer on a rich natural lawn, (studded with hollies and mountain-ash,) which at a small distance from the house

was divided into several verdant glades, that soon lost themselves in the deep recesses of the Forest.

On every side majestic woods afforded that shelter which its elevated situation required, through whose dark shades, neat little cottages, thatched and white-washed, occasionally caught the eye, and completely precluded every idea of melancholy solitude.

For many preceding generations this mansion had been the favourite residence of the Herberts, and the abode of benevolence and hospitality.

The late possessor, however, dying whilst his only son was yet an infant; the whole neighbourhood, and particularly the poor, had lamented, during a long minority, the absence of that festivity and munificence, which the Lodge had for ages been accustomed to display; and looked anxiously forward to the day, when it would again become the resi-

dence of another Herbert, in whom they had no doubt of discovering the same virtues as had dignified the former heads of that respectable family.

Severe, however, was their disappointment, when they understood that the heir did not intend to make the Lodge the place of his customary abode.

The termination of his minority approached, and no preparations were made there for celebrating the event. The tenants, peasantry, and poor looked in vain for the expected rejoicings, for the revival of ancient customs, and the re-appearance of former hospitality. The place was still silent, and many months elapsed after the young heir had come into possession of his property, before he even condescended to visit the residence of his fathers.

Mr. Herbert had, indeed, no taste for the beauties of nature; nor a heart that

could be gratified by the indulgence of the benevolent affections.

A modern education, concluded with the false polish of a foreign tour, had made him entirely an artificial character; depraved, though specious; selfish and insensible, though elegant and accomplished.

But as he had adopted, on coming to his estate, the character of a *dashing* man, it was necessary he should support it in all its parts, however discordant they might be with his favourite pursuits; and accordingly, his trained horses at Newmarket soon excited as much conversation amongst the knowing ones *there*, as his stud and foxhounds at Herbert-Lodge were celebrated by the sportsmen of the Forest.

The latter branch of his establishment drew him of course, during the hunting-seasons, to the dwelling of his ancestors;

and it was only at these times that he could *endure* its gloom and sequestration.

But as he always came attended by a large and mingled party, composed of staunch sportsmen, and of men like himself, who thought it necessary to their character to affect an enthusiastic fondness for an amusement in which they had no real enjoyment, his presence contributed little to the pleasure of the neighbouring families, or to the comfort or relief of the surrounding poor.

After his marriage, however, Mr. Herbert discontinued these annual scenes of revelry and riot at the Lodge; and with the exception of the one or two short summers which he spent there with his wife, neither visited nor attended to this romantic residence. It remained therefore neglected and unimproved, till it became the place of Mrs. Herbert's fixed abode.

Her elegant taste soon materially changed its appearance, and by some judicious alterations, in which the character of the country, and circumstances of the situation, were properly attended to, she converted Herbert-Lodge into one of the most beautiful seats of the neighbourhood.

The lawn was now surrounded by a belt of flowering shrubs, which concealed the paling that preserved its velvet verdure from the encroaching deer. A small opening to the left let in upon the eye a narrow vale, at the upper end of which, stood the Dairy, Dame Wheatley's neat habitation. Towards its bottom the brick-built spire of the village-church rose above the dark shade of a vast yew, whose spreading arms could not entirely conceal from the view the ivy-mantled rectory-house. The rooks were again invited to their ancient habitation at the back of the Lodge, from which they

had been scared by the wassails of Mr. Herbert's batchelor's parties; and by thinning a copse to the right, and removing some pollard elms, Mrs. Herbert caught a pleasing glance at the residences of the only two neighbours which were immediately near her.

The first of these was the mansion of Sir Nimrod Heartley, a staunch fox-hunter, and thorough sportsman, who, since the loss of his wife, had devoted himself entirely to the pleasures of the chase. The other was Stanmore Manor-house, the seat of Mr. Stanmore, a country magistrate; a man of excellent sense and benevolent heart; who passed the whole of his time in this delightful retreat, with an amiable wife, and Harriet, their only child, a sweet and interesting girl.

It was in the intimate intercourse of the last-mentioned family, and of the excellent rector; in the pursuits of bene-

ficence; and in an uninterrupted attention to the improvement of Mary's mind, that Mrs. Herbert both occupied and beguiled her time; as year after year rolled on, and saw her still disappointed in the hope of the return of Matilda from the continent, or of any reformation in the behaviour of her husband.

Of Henry, who had settled himself in commercial concerns with his uncle, she had regular and satisfactory accounts; in Edmund, (who was now a student at Oxford,) she discovered all the traits of character that could give a parent pleasure; and Mary, whom she had long loved with a mother's fondness, returned her attachment by every mark of filial respect, and every endeavour to promote her happiness.

In the cultivation of the virtues and accomplishments of this amiable girl, Mrs. Herbert found an occupation which was hourly more interesting to her, as

the progress of her pupil was every day more obvious.

The attention of the preceptress called forth a proportionate exertion in the young scholar; who evinced her feelings of gratitude by that conduct which she knew would be most gratifying to her benefactress, in an ardent thirst after excellence, and a strenuous endeavour to improve.

But whilst Mrs. Herbert, by the most encouraging commendations, both rewarded Mary for her diligence, and animated her to fresh exertions; she carefully strove to guard every avenue of her young heart against the entrance of vanity and conceit, those contemptible emotions which rob beauty of all its powers to charm, and render superior acquirements an useless if not a dangerous possession.

She did not indeed attempt to conceal from her those personal attractions which

would be the passport to general admiration when she mingled in society; nor the perfection she had attained in the accomplishments that the world regarded with esteem; but she taught her at the same time to consider them both as subordinate to the beauties of the mind, the charms of virtue, and the ornaments of intellect. She led her to consider herself as a rational and immortal being, whom moral excellence alone could make really estimable, and only practical piety could render truly happy.

Mary's person, indeed, was not perhaps such as might be stiled strictly *beautiful*; for she wanted that exact symmetry of feature, which seems necessary to entitle the countenance to this claim of *beauty*, and which is generally possessed at the loss of expression. But her face was exactly that which might be denominated *lovely*; every feature had its characteristic charm; and over the

toute ensemble was thrown the most enchanting expression.

The child of simplicity and candour, every emotion played in her speaking blue eye, as it arose in her soul; and the delicate feelings of a heart, innocent and pure as the driven snow, but tremblingly alive to every amiable sensibility, gave a lustre, animation, and intelligence, to her face, which defied art to imitate, or the pencil to pourtray.

The attractions of Miss Wheatley's person, however, were still less fascinating than the native charms of her disposition, and the delightful sweetness of her manners.

Her modesty, gentleness, and diffidence, fixed the impressions that her loveliness inspired, and rendered her superiority in mental proficiency more an object of admiration than envy.

It was these which engaged the esteem and attachment of her associates; which

made her the universal favourite of the visitors of the Lodge; which riveted the heart of Harriet Stanmore to her, in bonds of the strictest friendship; and improved the tender friendship that Edmund had ever possessed for his adopted sister, into the warmest and most disinterested love.

About this period that storm was fermenting in France, which has since convulsed all Europe, and introduced such changes into the political system of the civilized world, as the records of history cannot parallel.

As the clouds gradually deepened, the rumours of approaching revolution reached the peaceful habitation of Mrs. Herbert, and excited fears of the most distressing nature for the safety of Matilda, from whom it was long since she had received any satisfactory intelligence.

Whilst under the impressions of this painful suspense respecting a daughter, whom, notwithstanding her long absence, she still loved with the sincerest fondness; she was one morning exceedingly surprized by the appearance of Sir Charles Fitzmordaunt at the Lodge, of whose arrival in England she had not before heard.

It was now several years since they had last met, but so great a change in his appearance and features had taken place during the interval, that had not the servant announced her brother by his name, she would scarcely have recollected his altered physiognomy.

The gloomy frown and chilling coldness of his countenance, which she could not but observe at their last interview, were now deepened into an expression of the darkest ferocity; and associated as it naturally would be, in Mrs. Herbert's mind, with a recollection of his detest-

able cruelty to Henry, it struck such a damp upon her heart, as for a moment deadened every other feeling than that of horror at his sight. As he approached her, she involuntarily shuddered; and the welcome she would have pronounced died away upon her lips.

A few moments, however, restored her presence of mind, and after the interchange of the customary compliments, she enquired with an earnestness of manner, in which the mother only was visible, "where he had left Matilda, and why she saw him unaccompanied by the beloved child, or Lady Antoinette?"

Sir Charles coldly replied, they were both on the road, and would be at the Lodge on the following day; but as Lady Antoinette's health was in a declining state, and she unable to travel so rapidly as he wished, he had come on by himself, and left Herbert (who had for some time been with them, and ac-

accompanied them from France) to escort the party to the Forest. ‘As my own stay,’ continued he, ‘can be but short, a day was a matter of consequence to me, pressed and hurried as I am, by a thousand calls upon my time and attention.’

Relieved by this account from her painful solicitude, Mrs. Herbert proceeded to question her brother on the person and improvement of Matilda; but his answers were vague and unsatisfactory, till at length, as if wearied by a subject in which he felt no interest, he peevishly exclaimed, ‘Pr’ythee, no more of this; *my mind* has been too painfully occupied, to attend to the progressive improvement in a girl’s education; but doubtless Lady Antoinette has performed her part, and spared neither pains nor expence in the accomplishments of your daughter.’

“ I fear,” said Mrs. Herbert, sighing deeply, and fixing her penetrating but mournful look on Sir Charles, “ you must have witnessed many painful and distressing scenes both of public and private calamity.”

‘ Who can remain long in this world,’ replied the baronet, with a countenance in which fierceness and melancholy were blended, ‘ without, not only *witnessing*, but also *feeling* many heart-rending woes ?’

“ Alas!” returned Mrs. Herbert, “ general experience, I fear, will confirm the truth of your remark. But still, no doubt, the dispensation is wise and good; and I cannot help considering the afflictions which we suffer, as *salutary* chastisements, intended to wean us from a state that is but transient, and to prepare us for one that is to be as durable as happy.”

‘ Dreams of the nursery, child,’ said the baronet; ‘ as well might you attempt to make me believe that deadly poison is productive of health and vigour, as that suffering and sorrow should be *salutary* to the wretches who are submitted to their attack.’

At this moment the door opened, and the light and elegant form of Mary tripped into the room; her complexion heightened by the air, and exercise of a long walk; her eyes sparkling with animation; and a sweet smile playing over her features, the genuine offspring of an innocent and cheerful heart. A native grace seemed to regulate every motion of her person, and her whole appearance indicated health, tranquillity, and happiness.

Mrs. Herbert immediately introduced her to her brother, as the little orphan whom he had formerly honoured with some marks of his attention; and Mary

approached him with alacrity, to bid him welcome to the Lodge.

The appearance of the baronet, however, repressed her steps. A sudden paleness overspread his countenance; an universal tremor shook his frame; and clapping his hand to his forehead, he turned abruptly to the window.

Mary, alarmed at these symptoms of extraordinary emotion, stood fixed in astonishment; whilst Mrs. Herbert tenderly enquired “ whether he were indisposed? and what she might offer to him for his relief?”

The questions seemed at once to restore him to recollection; he replied, that he had been long subject to attacks of a spasmodic nature, which affected his head in a violent manner; that happily they were not of long duration, but were soon relieved by air and quiet; he would therefore take a few turns in the garden by himself, and join the party.

at dinner; by which time he had no doubt of being perfectly recovered.

Mrs. Herbert and Mary accordingly quitted the room, and left Sir Charles to himself, who on his re-appearance seemed to have regained in some degree his serenity. His countenance, however, was still gloomy and severe, his manner absent, and his conversation abrupt; so that it was not without some satisfaction, that they heard him give orders for his horses on the ensuing morning, that he might proceed to Fitzmordaunt-castle, to transact some business there before he returned to France, where his presence was indispensably necessary.

The hoped-for pleasure of embracing her long-lost child entirely occupied the mind of Mrs. Herbert, and her heart beat quicker, as the hour of her arrival approached. Mary too looked forward with delight to the promised

meeting with one of her earliest and dearest friends; and Edmund, who had reached home on the preceding evening from Oxford, participated in the pleasure, and sympathised in the feelings of both.

The anxiously wished-for time at length arrived. The gay equipage of Lady Antoinette drove up the lawn. All a mother's sensibilities were throbbing in the bosom of Mrs. Herbert, when the carriage stopped at the gate, and in a moment she pressed Matilda to her breast.

Tears mingled with kisses welcomed the child to a home, to which she had been so many years a stranger; whilst the ardent embrace of Matilda seemed to evince, that her affection for her mother had not been lessened by time and distance.

While Mary waited impatiently for an opportunity of claiming her share in these tender endearments, she gazed

with admiration on the beauty of Matilda's form, and the inimitable grace of her air.

In her lovely features, and sweetly-toned voice, she recognized the affectionate companion, whose nursery she had shared, and in whose pleasures she had been a partner; and warmed with the recollection of their infantine enjoyments, which her heart assured her would be more delightfully supplied by the intercourse of maturer friendship, she advanced towards Matilda, and gently taking her hand, pressed it fervently to her lips, whilst the tear of sensibility and joy trembled in her eyes.

Miss Herbert instantly quitting her mother, turned towards Mary, and coldly drawing her hand from the pressure of that of her old play-fellow, with affected surprize and genuine hauteur, begged to be informed, " who the young lady

might be, that had so much the advantage of her in point of recollection?"

Mary's mortification and disappointment, at this unexpected disavowal of former intimacy, were extreme; but could not exceed the astonishment of Mrs. Herbert, nor the chagrin of Edmund.

'What, Matilda,' cried he, with quickness, 'is it possible you should have forgotten the friend of your childhood, the companion of your early years; that affectionate little Mary, whom you once so dearly loved, and who returned your love with even a still warmer attachment?'

"Why, indeed," replied Matilda, after a short pause, "I must confess that a faint recollection of these circumstances *does* revive in my mind, now you have mentioned them. But the fact is, my time has been so differently employed during my long absence from Herbert-Lodge, to what it was before I left it;

and my thoughts engaged in such an endless variety of interesting and agreeable ways; that I hope I may be pardoned if the adventures of the *nursery*, Edmund, should have faded from my memory."

'The errors of recollection, Matilda, may be readily excused,' returned Edmund, 'provided they are not the offspring of *extinguished feeling*. But the *head* must not be pardoned at the expence of the *heart*; and nothing can justify an oblivion of the tender ties of early friendship. It is possible, indeed, that vanity and folly, ever hostile to the charms of simplicity, and the joys of sensibility, may *affect* an ignorance which they do not labour under; but far be it from me to apply the observation to my sister, or to suspect for one moment that a French education should have destroyed or perverted those fine feelings which she once possessed, and to lose which would be to part with all that is

most lovely and estimable in her character.'

"Upon my word, sir," cried Matilda, with a contemptuous sneer, "you do me infinite honour by your good opinion of me. I feel also highly gratified by your solemn observations. But I must confess at the same time, that I am not particularly partial to *moralizing*; and therefore, I fear, the sense of my obligation to you on the occasion is not quite so great as such a valuable lecture deserves."

Further conversation was prevented by the entrance of Lady Antoinette into the room, very much to the satisfaction of Mrs. Herbert, who perceived that it would have been carried on with acrimony, and probably ended in a quarrel.

She had, indeed, already heard sufficient to render her exceedingly unhappy; to confirm every fear which had arisen in her mind when Matilda left her, of

the sad effects that would arise from a foreign education; and to perceive that, with all the glitter of accomplishment, there was still wanting in her daughter's character those features which Mrs. Herbert prized far beyond the tricks of art,—natural simplicity, affectionate feelings, and serious principles.

But her attention was not allowed to dwell long on this cruel disappointment of the pleasure she had promised herself in the return of Matilda; Lady Antoinette, supported by Mr. Herbert, now tottered towards her; and Mrs. Herbert, kindly pressing her hand, welcomed her to England, and led her to a sofa.

But, ah! what a frightful change did she remark in the person of her sister-in-law.

Her beautiful face was emaciated by disease; and her fair form bent with debility; her eye languid and hollow; and her voice deep but feeble, interrupted.

by the frequent cough, and a constant laboured respiration. An appearance of fretful discontent sat upon her brow, the consequence of her incapacity to partake longer in those pleasures, which had hitherto been the business of her life, and the only objects of her attention; whilst the influence of vanity on her character was still visible, in the profusion of paint on her face and neck, in the fashionable pattern of her dress, and the variety of ornaments that decorated her person.

“ My dear Lady Antoinette,” said Mrs. Herbert, with a look of real concern, “ I cannot express how much the pleasure which your presence affords me, is lessened by the appearance of your invalid state. I trust, however, the air of the Forest will be of service to you, and the *quiet* of our retreat soon restore you to your former health.”

‘Oh,’ cried Herbert, who had before greeted his lady with a nod, and now looked at her with a significant and severe air, ‘mere *fatigue* from the jolting of your cursed Forest roads. Why, one might as well travel through a marble quarry. The trifling indisposition which the latter part of the journey has occasioned, will quickly be removed, and Lady Antoinette be sufficiently refreshed for any schemes of pleasure this dull place may offer to her.

‘*Quiet*, indeed! pray don’t think, Caroline, that we are come to mope and coo amongst the trees like turtle-doves in a covert. No! you must shew us all the lions of your neighbourhood, make us laugh at your squires, quiz your old unmarried Sylvan goddesses, fit up the saloon for a concert-room, and hire a set of strolling-players for our evening amusement in the picture-gallery.’

“ I protest, my dear sir,” exclaimed Matilda, “ I am quite delighted to hear what you say. The moment I entered the Forest, I was seized with a nervous attack; and when I got to the Lodge, the gloom and stillness of every thing around quite petrified me. Heavens! what a Siberia must the place be in winter. But you, I know, sir, will endeavour to convert it into something supportable; and if we can’t have the enjoyments of Paris here, we shall be able, with your assistance, to extract some amusement from the bores by which we are surrounded.”

‘ Yes,’ said Lady Antoinette, her cough interrupting her as she spoke, ‘ Yes, ma chere Caroline, we are just come from the very centre of bon ton and pleasure, and left Paris in the height of its gaiety; you will therefore, I am sure, do all you can to recompense us for such a sacrifice. . You must give our

dear Matilda frequent opportunities of shewing her grace in a cotillon; and you'll not deny me, I dare say, a party at cassino every evening. I shall soon shake off the slight cough that troubles me at present, which I think has been increased, if not occasioned, by your vile English air.'

"You are right, my dear Lady An-tionette," answered Mr. Herbert, "ours is a wretched Bæotian climate, fraught with nothing but colds, agues, and blue-devils; but you'll soon become more accustomed to it. However, with all its abominable qualities, it has not been able to impair your *looks*, for I think I never saw *them* more enchanting than they are at present."

The compliment was received by the lady to whom it was addressed, with a complacent smile of self-satisfaction, which proved that no doubt was entertained of its truth; but the impression

which it made on some others of the party, was of a far different and more melancholy nature.

To Mrs. Herbert it was sufficiently evident that Lady Antoinette had reached the last stage of a consumption; but that, afraid to contemplate her real situation, she tried by every art of delusion to banish the conviction of it from her mind; and to delay, if not ward off, the fatal summons.

With every faculty of enjoyment worn out and exhausted, she still continued to pursue the phantom pleasure with all her customary eagerness; not for the gratification it could afford her, but because it prevented her thoughts from being directed to an event, which she could anticipate only with alarm and horror.

Her mind, continually occupied with the follies and vices of a fashionable life, had lain up no stores of consolation

for those dark hours when worldly joys lose all their power to charm ; and she was now far advanced in an incurable disease, unprepared with any means of comfort and solace, under the torturing certainty of its progressive increase, and inevitable fatal termination.

The pupil and the victim of dissipation, she had lost, at the early age of six and thirty, not only the sprightliness of youth, and the vigour of health, but also all the power of her understanding, and all the energies of her mind. Accustomed only to the unrestrained indulgence of her inclinations, she had never been called upon for mental exertion, nor afforded the opportunities of moral improvement.

The smooth career of pleasure in which she had passed her days, had left no time for the cultivation of her judgment, the exercise of laudable affections, the form-

ation of good principles, or the acquirement of useful knowledge.

Her heart, first debilitated, had at length become corrupted, by the gay round of a fashionable life; every social feeling was converted into a base selfishness, which studied its own gratifications alone; her temper, impatient of contradiction, was peevish and fretful; and her mind, without resources, eagerly thirsted for successive amusements, which, tho' often repeated, and as frequently dismissed with disgust, yet were again resorted to, to prevent that dismal mental vacuity, or those more intolerable reflections on her approaching fate, which their absence produced.

Mrs. Herbert clearly saw the situation of her sister, and sincerely pitied it; but it was out of her power either to correct the fatal causes of it, or avert its certain consequences.

The kindness of her heart, however, immediately dictated every means of affording that pleasure to Lady Antoinette which she was capable of experiencing; and amongst other little schemes of amusing occupation, she proposed a visit to Netley-Abbey, as soon as her ladyship should have recovered from the fatigue of her journey.

The proposal was received with the highest satisfaction by all the party, and seemed to diffuse a degree of good humour even over those who were least accustomed to the feeling.

Lady Antoinette pressed the hand of Mrs. Herbert, and assured her she had “always considered her as the most amiable of women.”

Mr. Herbert spoke with great kindness to his son, and even bestowed some handsome compliments on Mary’s manner and appearance; whilst Matilda, descending a little from the haughtiness

of her first behaviour, assumed an appearance of civility towards the orphan, which, if it did not meet the warmth of her own feelings, was, at the same time, less distressing to her heart, than the repelling coldness of Miss Herbert's first return to her affectionate welcome.

CHAPTER III.

IN the course of a few days the party for Netley-Abbey was assembled at breakfast at Herbert-Lodge, prepared to set out on the intended expedition. It consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, their children, and guests; Dr. Fairford, the Stanmore family, and Sir Nimrod Heartley.

After a ride of an hour and half they were at the place of embarkation. The day was remarkably fine, a gentle breeze swelled their sails, and the sun played upon the rippling surface of the waters.

The receding shores alternately presented a rich variety of views, whilst the ample bosom of the river on which they were embarked, “studded thick with many a sail,” afforded a variety in the objects before them, of the most interesting nature. A band of music followed in another boat at a proper distance, whose harmony swelling on the breeze, and re-echoed by the woods that cloathed the banks, which they occasionally approached, diversified their amusements, and increased the animation of their feelings.

After a sail which they had purposely lengthened till towards the afternoon, the party landed, to partake of some refreshments, and examine the beautiful remains of Gothic architecture which the dilapidated abbey displayed.

A table had been spread in the open area of the building, covered with an elegant cold collation, and the music

disposed behind a vast fragment of wall overgrown with ivy, which at the same time concealed the performers, and melted the sounds of the instruments into the softest harmony.

As the party sat at their repast, they caught a beautiful view of the river through the great western window, which time seemed to have despoiled of its stone-work in order to admit the interesting scene; whilst directing their eyes to the opposite point, the vista was terminated by the exquisite tracery of the eastern window, still preserving all its architectural elegance, and rendered more picturesque by the foliage of different trees which had shot their branches through its various apertures, and prevented a more distant view.

Broken columns, rich capitals, and mutilated sepulchral effigies, lay scattered around them in ruinous confusion; monuments at once of art and barbarism,

of superstition exerting herself for the honour of heaven, in two opposite directions, equally mistaken and perverse.

“ I think, Doctor,” said Mr. Stanmore, turning to the rector, “ you men of taste should consider yourselves as very much obliged to Henry the Eighth, and Oliver Cromwell, for furnishing you with such rich, numerous, and beautiful subjects for your pencils, in those ecclesiastical and military ruins which they scattered through the country.”

‘ Why, my good friend,’ returned the rector, ‘ as abstract objects of *taste*, I confess to you, my fancy always dwells upon such scenes as these with delight; but when I associate with this contemplation the circumstances of cruelty, distress, and confusion, that attended the destruction of these fabrics, a very considerable portion of my pleasure is destroyed. The undistinguishing fury of religious persecution, and the unspa-

ring atrocities of civil convulsions, are not very agreeable subjects for the imagination to dwell upon.'

"Right, my dear sir," replied Mr. Stanmore, the same idea has always presented itself to my mind, when a ruin like the present has been before me; and I apprehend, could we analyze the feeling, that a great part of the melancholy impression which the reflecting mind experiences on the view of similar objects, may originate in the association you have just alluded to.

"But," added he, "another painful consideration with me, respecting these remains, and which applies particularly to dilapidated *religious* houses, is the prodigious injury the *poor* have sustained in the loss of those constant and large eleemosynary donations which were dealt out to them from the charitable inmates of these consecrated dwellings. How many of the children of poverty, for

instance, were daily supplied with the means of subsistence from the gate of the very abbey in which we now are? Methinks I can *see* at this moment the rosy lay-brother, who filled the office of butler to the brotherhood, dividing amongst the aged and the infirm the superfluities of the abbot's hospitable board; and hear the blessings and the prayers of gratitude, which the generous boon drew forth from those who had received it."

'A *pleasing* picture, I must confess,' cried the Doctor, 'which only wants the circumstance of *truth* to make it quite enchanting. But I am afraid, my excellent friend, if you had employed *reality* instead of *imagination* to sketch your canvas, the result would not have been quite so favourable to this part of the monastic system as you have represented.

'Had the members of these religious houses directed their attention to the

minds instead of the *bodies* of the poor around them; instructed them in their duties as creatures of God, rational beings, and members of society; encouraged them in habits of industry, and taught them to supply their own wants by the active exercise and proper direction of those powers which Providence had bestowed upon them; they would have contributed infinitely more to the happiness of the poor, and the benefit of the community, than by their indiscriminate daily alms, which only served to foster indolence, and to render all exertion unnecessary. They would have implanted in the subordinate classes, the valuable principles of self-respect and honest shame, which scorn the disgrace of dependence upon others, whilst the energy of their own industry can supply their wants; and though, by such an alteration the board of the cottager might not have been so delicately or

largely supplied as before, yet the coarse morsels which it presented would have been accompanied by a *sauce*, whose relish would have made ample amends for the deficiency,—the conviction of their having been procured by honest and industrious labour.

‘ Indeed, I cannot help thinking, that if more regard were paid to this principle of *moral improvement*, in our *present* pauper system, we should be a much happier people than we are; and I am convinced, unless it be recognized very speedily, the evils of the poor’s-law will become intolerable.’

“ Very true, Doctor,” exclaimed Sir Nimrod from the bottom of the table, “ those cursed poor-rates will do us up at last. Why, they’ve increased from four-pence to three shillings in the pound here in our parish, even since I can remember. Every six weeks I’m put into the devil of a passion by that

scoundrel Spriggings the overseer calling upon me, and whistling through his spectacled nose, ‘I’m come for another poor-rate, your honour.’ Rabbit it, I wish I’d lived in those times when no such things were yet *invented*.”

‘What then, Sir Nimrod,’ said Matilda, ‘you would have had no objection, I presume, to have worn the mitre of this monastery, and been the lord-abbot of Netley?’

“None at all, fair lady, if I could have had such an *abbess* as *yourself*. But don’t think I’d have bargained for the company of a parcel of old stupid monks only, and shut out female charms from my convent. No, no; *poor-rates* would be better than such a dull life as that.”

‘Our sex is much indebted to you for the compliment, Sir Nimrod; and I feel pleased that I have the honour of being in the same opinion with yourself respecting these gloomy and unsocial mansions.

I confess I detest the very thought of them. They seem to have been formed for the very purpose of extinguishing human happiness. Declaring war against all the pleasures of life, all the delights of fashion, and all the charms of the *bon ton*, they are only fit for your sentimentalists; for those *discreet* and *sober-minded persons*, (casting a glance at Mary,) who can regulate their conduct with the precision of clock-work, and have as much feeling as the automaton chess-player."

'You entirely mistake the nature of these conventual institutions, Matilda,' cried Edmund; 'they were intended as retreats for those who had not *discretion* and *sober-mindedness* enough to resist the temptations of the world; not for such as they whose wisdom and prudence were sufficient securities for behaving well in the midst of them.'

"That is, sir," replied Matilda, colouring deeply, and evidently much

piqued, "convents were intended, I suppose, as places of security for thoughtless creatures like *myself*? (Edmund smiled and bowed.) But I thank heaven, the times are passed, when such abominable tyranny could be exercised over our sex. No! *the rights of women* are now not only understood, but allowed; and the same range of thinking, and freedom of action, which lordly man had hitherto exclusively confined to himself, are now dispensed to his companion and equal in creation."

'Bravo, young lady!' vociferated Sir Nimrod. 'What will Master Edmund say to *that*? I'll bet my best hunter against Herbert's wall-eyed coach-horse, that you'd beat him out and out at fair argument any day; and that let him say as much as he would, you'd still have the *last word*.'

A general laugh succeeded this speech, which seemed to allay the warmth that

Edmund's remark had excited in Matilda; and called up a smile even in the dejected countenance of Lady Antoinette, who had hitherto appeared to be insensible to the animation of the rest of the party, and lost in vacant absence, except when adjusting the curls upon her forehead, or giving a fresh tint to the rouge on her cheeks, by the assistance of a little etwis-case which she carried in her pocket.

It was, however, only a transient gleam of mental sunshine; she soon relapsed into her former gloom; and at length begged that Mrs. Herbert would let her retire from the *hideous* place in which they were, the proper residence of bats and hobgoblins, where she had been almost petrified with cold, and killed with *ennui*.

In compliance with the wish of Lady Antoinette, a general move now took place, sorely against the approbation of

Sir Nimrod, who thought it a sort of sacrilege to quit the ruins without finishing another bottle to the memory of the last jolly abbot who had presided over them.

“Odd’s heart,” cried he, “I’d give up the finest October morning for a scent that ever I was out in, to stay another hour in this delightful place; I mean, (added he, looking at Matilda,) if my *lady abbess* would remain with me. I must bargain too for a little more sport with the young squire. I think if she were to start him again, she wouldn’t quit the game till she’d run him fairly down.

“But come, my little heroine, if we must be going, do favour me so far as to accept of my arm to the boat; it won’t sink under you, I promise you.”

Matilda gaily gave him her hand, and warbling delightfully, as she quitted the ruins, “Adieu, thou dreary pile,

where sorrow ever dwells!" tripped lightly on with the baronet to the river side.

As the evening dew had begun to fall before the party left the boat, it was proposed that Lady Antoinette should take a seat in Mr. Stanmore's coach instead of returning in the phaeton, in which Mr. Herbert had driven her down in the morning to the place of embarkation. This being assented to, Matilda gladly relinquished her seat in the close carriage to her ladyship, and ascended her father's phaeton, under the auspices of Sir Nimrod, who begged the honour of driving her to the Lodge.

Mr. Herbert, resigning the reins to the baronet, mounted Sir Nimrod's horse, and accompanied Henry, who had ridden his own favourite poney to the water side.

The carriages drove briskly on, and Mr. Herbert purposely suffered them to

get considerably before him on two accounts, that he might not interrupt the conversation of Sir Nimrod with his daughter, who, he perceived, with considerable satisfaction, had been much struck by her beauty and animation; and in order to obtain some private conversation with Edmund, on a subject of considerable importance to his own security and interest.

They were now just losing sight of the phaeton, by the bending of the road, when Edmund observed, “ Upon my honour, the baronet and Matilda seem to be as intimate as if they had been acquainted for years. Were she five and twenty instead of nineteen, and he twenty years younger than he is, I should not despair of soon calling him my brother-in-law.”

‘ Why, Edmund,’ replied his father, ‘ I do not see any improbability in your numbering Sir Nimrod amongst your

relations, even without such changes taking place in the dates of their nati-
vities. He is a very worthy character with
a very noble estate, and would keep your
sister in a style which both her accom-
plishments deserve, and her expectations
demand. As for myself, I confess I
should be extremely happy if Sir Nimrod
were to make her an offer.'

"Heavens, sir," cried Edmund, "you
astonish me. Sir Nimrod Heartley the
husband of Matilda! Consider the dis-
parity of their ages, the difference in
their sentiments, the inequality of their
education, the ——"

'Pho! pho!' interrupted Mr. Herbert,
'all absurd prejudices and antiquated
notions. Of what consequence are such
trifling circumstances as these, when
compared with the important ones of a
large estate and an ancient title? What
reasonable woman, or man either, regards
any object in forming a matrimonial

alliance, but its eligibility in a pecuniary point of view? Every other particular may be considered as an indifferent one. As to *age*, the older a girl's husband is, the sooner she gets rid of *him*, and is ready for another; and with respect to a *congeniality of sentiment*, as it is called, why people live so much in public, and so little with each other, that it cannot be of the least consequence whether they *harmonize* or not in this respect."

"But surely, sir," returned Edmund, "you cannot suppose that a girl of Matilda's strong understanding could feel the least *esteem* for a man of such inferior endowments and qualifications as Sir Nimrod; and I presume that neither you would wish her to be united to, nor would she herself consent to marry, a person whom from his inferiority of mind she must necessarily *despise*."

'Sir,' resumed his father, 'that very *understanding* which you have just com-

plimented, would teach her to *adopt* the step that so decidedly meets your disapprobation. Matilda has been educated in, and is well acquainted with, the world. She possesses the most liberal and enlarged notions, and has vanquished all those prejudices which keep more common minds than hers in awe. Her spirit too is high; she loves power, and is formed to enjoy it. The *inferiority*, therefore, of Sir Nimrod's *understanding* would be no objection to your sister. On the contrary, she would consider it as a most desirable circumstance, since it would inevitably give her such an ascendancy over him, as would make her complete mistress of her own conduct, and allow her the undisputed regulation of his.'

"But could such an usurped dominion as this, my dear sir," said Edmund, "make amends for what she must sacrifice to obtain it; the absence of all the delightful charities of the conjugal

state, reciprocal respect and esteem, mutual condescension and forbearance, the exquisite joys of sympathy, and the elysian pleasures that flow from disinterested love?"

'And pray, young gentleman,' returned his father, 'to answer one question by asking another, of how much avail would be all these most delectable products, of what, in your vocabulary, would be called *an happy marriage*, in the *absence* of a good estate, a noble jointure, the charms of high life, and the gaiety of *bon ton*? Absurd and nonsensical reasoning, fit only for the nursery of Herbert-Lodge, and *your mother's* pupils. I am glad, however, the conversation has taken this turn, as it has given me an opportunity of expressing my sentiments in a concise way, respecting the principles which should regulate young people in forming the marriage union; and will save me a great deal of

trouble in explaining and enforcing a proposition of that nature, which I am commissioned to make to *yourself*.'

Edmund started and coloured.

'Nay,' pursued his father, 'you need not be *alarmed* at the *offer* that is made you; I believe there is no young man, circumstanced as you are, who would not be delighted with it. You know Charlotte Monson.'

"Yes, sir, I have seen her once or twice."

'And what may your opinion be of her?'

"Why indeed, sir, her *toute ensemble* was so little interesting to me, that no sufficient impression remains upon my mind to enable me to give any *decided* opinion of her. I *think*, however, she is neither handsome nor agreeable; and certainly not the woman I would choose for a wife."

‘ Oh, sir, if those be the only objections which can be urged against the lady, let me assure you they are of very little importance. In a *mistress* I would willingly allow their weight, but in a *wife* they are not worth a thought. The same pretty face at the head of your table is a toy that one soon becomes tired of; and as for the *agreeables* in a wife, why the very circumstance of a woman’s being wedded to you, would quickly cure her of *that* quality in your estimation. But to be serious, Edmund; Mr. Monson has proposed uniting our families together, by giving you his daughter Charlotte. He is willing to make a most handsome settlement upon her immediately; and as she is an only child, and her father exceedingly rich, she must eventually prove a prodigious fortune to you. I have promised for your acquiescence, and I cannot for a moment suppose that your good sense

will permit you to hesitate confirming your father's engagement.'

"Marry Charlotte Monson! Impossible, sir! My affections are already—I—I would say, it is not in our power, sir, to command our affections; they cannot be regulated by the cold motives of prudence, nor directed by the mercenary prospects of interest. Were I to offer her my *hand*, my *heart* would refuse to accompany the proposal; and every principle of feeling, and every law of honour, forbid me to make vows, which my soul tells me I could never perform."

'Absurd rhapsody, Edmund; the weak prejudices which you picked up in childhood, when you were tied to your mother's apron-string; and have since nourished in the romantic shades of the Forest, whilst playing the Damon with her little sentimental protégée. I have often repented that I suffered you to remain so long under maternal tuition,

and permitted all your vacant time to be spent in the same enervating society, instead of sending you out into the world. But regret on this head is now too late. However, sir, let me not find that amongst her other excellent lessons Caroline has taught you to forget your duty to your father. Though your uncle Jerningham, with an infatuation that marked him for a madman, put you in possession, at the age of eighteen, of a property that sets you above want; yet you will recollect it neither exempts you from your filial obedience, nor can prevent your interests from being materially injured, if you incur my displeasure. Nay, sir, do not attempt to make any reply. I will admit of no compromise. I expect Monson and his daughter at the Lodge, in the course of a fortnight; and according as your behaviour is agreeable or contrary to my wishes,

will depend the terms on which your father and yourself are in future to live.'

Having said this with great vehemence in tone and manner, he spurred his horse, and set off at a full gallop to overtake the rest of the party.

Edmund's distress at his father's concluding declaration could only be equalled by the surprize which he felt on his first mentioning the subject.

As Mr. Herbert had spent a considerable part of his time on the continent with the Fitzmordaunts, and when in England was rarely and for very short periods at the Lodge, it was not to be expected that his son should entertain for him the finer feelings of filial affection; which, though they have their foundation in nature, can be kept alive only by the frequent interchange of mutual acts of kindness and love.

But though he acknowledged none of those sentiments of rapturous attach-

ment to him, which he felt for his mother; yet the principles she had instilled into his mind, had impressed it with high ideas of the importance of filial duty and respect; and he shuddered at the prospect of an incurable breach even with a father from whom he had received scarcely any marks of parental fondness.

On the other hand, the idea of sacrificing his happiness to an arbitrary mandate, and connecting himself for life with a woman he could neither esteem nor love, was not for a moment to be tolerated; and any alternative seemed preferable to that, which would interfere as much with principle as with inclination.

Besides, another reason lurked in his bosom, which opposed itself to an acquiescence in his father's will, though he had not mentioned it amongst the objections which he urged for his non-compliance. He had no heart to dispose

of; it was surrendered to Mary Wheatley. She reigned over his affections with undivided sway, and her empire had been too long established to be shaken by any other claimant, whatever her pretensions might be.

It is true, indeed, he had never declared to the object of it a passion, which, planted in childhood, had grown up with youth, and been strengthened by the contemplation of Mary's more perfect charms, and maturer virtues; nor perhaps had he ever till now clearly understood the extent of an attachment, which had been so gradual in its progress as to render its increase scarcely perceptible to the bosom that fostered it.

But the moment the sacrifice of his affections was demanded, he discovered how completely they were in the possession of another; and found how deeply the felicity of his future life was concerned in the *return* of similar senti-

ments, from the object who had captivated his heart.

Another alarm, however, was suggested to his bosom by the review which he now took of its feelings.

He was yet unacquainted with the state of Mary's opinions with respect to himself. He knew not if she regarded him with more than a sisterly friendship; and whether her heart might not acknowledge some other prepossession fatal to his hopes.

He had been much absent from the Lodge, and she was universally admired: what then could be more probable, than that a fortunate rival should have obtained that place in her affections, which he had never attempted to secure by disclosing to her the state of his own?

Occupied in these distressing meditations, Edmund rode slowly on without attending to the lateness of the hour, so

that it was nearly supper-time when he arrived at the Lodge.

On his entrance into the parlour, he found only his mother and Mary; Lady Antoinette having been so much fatigued by the expedition, as to be under the necessity of retiring to her dressing-room, whither Herbert and Matilda had attended her, in order to amuse away an hour by reading to her a new novel, which had just been received from London.

Mrs. Herbert was busied in arranging her weekly accounts, and Mary in finishing some sketches of the abbey, which she had taken in the course of the day.

The ladies rallied Edmund on the lateness of his return, and begged to be informed what adventure had occurred, to prevent them from having the honour of his escort; drawing a comparison between the *gallantry* of the married gentlemen, who had been their humble

servants through the dangerous shades of the Forest, and the *want* of it in the only bachelor of the party.

Edmund endeavoured to answer in the same strain of sportive gaiety, but in vain ; his tongue faltered, and his manner was embarrassed. An awkward apology only served to excite their real curiosity ; and the inattention which he paid to their questions, and the unusual absence that marked his conversation, convinced them that something particular had actually happened on his return home, to disturb and agitate his mind.

All their enquiries, however, produced no satisfactory information ; he would only confess that “ a violent pain in the head had rendered him exceedingly stupid ; and, as he was convinced, that such a *dull* companion could add nothing to their amusement, he would take his leave of them till the morrow, when

he hoped he should be found less disagreeable than he must be at present." Saying this, he took his candle from the side-board, and bidding the ladies an affectionate adieu, retired to his chamber.

CHAPTER IV.

EDMUND's slumbers were neither long nor refreshing. He rose early in the morning, after a restless night, during which he had been alternately disturbed by distressing dreams, and agitated by the most painful waking thoughts.

A solitary walk seemed to promise composure to his spirits, and passing over the lawn in the front of the house, he turned into one of the glades of the adjoining forest.

He had not proceeded many steps, when he observed, at the other end of the

opening, a female form coming towards him. In a few minutes he perceived it to be Miss Wheatley, but what was his mortification, when he found, that instead of meeting him, as she had hitherto been accustomed to do, she turned from the path the moment she discovered him, and was lost in the surrounding wood.

Surprize riveted him to the spot, and for an instant he remained in doubt, whether he should follow Mary, or suffer her to escape him without requesting an explanation of her unusual behaviour.

“ Ah !” whispered he to himself, “ it is as my heart foreboded ; Mary dwells in secret on the fond idea of some favoured youth, whose happier stars have given him that interest in her affections, which I do not possess. But let me not be the victim of suspense. I will learn from her own lips the fatal truth, and having heard my doom, will endeavour

to subdue an hopeless passion, by eternal absence from the object of it."

Saying this, he struck into the thicket; and walking briskly towards the spot where Mary had disappeared, soon overtook her.

At the noise of his approach, she turned her head, and discovered a countenance of the most pensive kind, on which the tear still glistened that had lately fallen from her eye.

"Heavens!" cried Edmund, seizing her hand, and pressing it to his lips, "you weep, my Mary; what can have occasioned this cruel agitation?"

Averting her face, she blushed deeply, and was silent.

"Oh!" continued he, "do not harrow my soul by this cruel refusal to gratify my painful curiosity. Inform me, I conjure you, of the cause of your distress. Nothing can wound my Mary's

bosom, without deeply interesting that of Edmund."

'I weep, my brother,' replied the gentle girl, 'because—I see that *you* are *unhappy*.'

"And is it possible," returned Edmund, "that you can take so deep, so kind an interest in my feelings? May I indulge the dear, the transporting hope, that Edmund's *happiness* can be of any consequence to Mary? May I encourage the flattering idea, that the sentiment which has so long filled *my* bosom has found a sympathetic one in *yours*?"

Mary looked tenderly at him, and her head sank upon his shoulder.

"Oh, inestimable girl," returned Edmund, "how shall my heart thank you for this condescension? How shall I prove my gratitude and love? Yes, Mary, long has my bosom acknowledged the influence of your excellences, and

secretly felt your unrivalled controul over its affections. It is true, indeed, I have never ventured to *declare* its impressions in *words*, however my *looks* may have unfolded them; nor should even now have broken rudely in upon your solitude, to tell you how much I adore your virtues, had not a circumstance occurred last night, which renders it necessary for me to be more abrupt than delicacy would otherwise have dictated."

He then proceeded to inform her of the conversation which had passed between his father and himself during their ride on the preceding evening, and which had occasioned his embarrassed and absent manner after his return to the Lodge. He declared his determination to hazard the anger of Mr. Herbert, by instantly assuring him of his resolution not to accede to Mr. Monson's hateful proposal; and hinted that the most

effectual way of putting a stop to any further trouble on that account, would be for him to solicit the hand of her who already possessed his heart, as soon as his minority should have elapsed; an event which would take place in the course of a few months.

“ You know, my dearest Mary,” continued he, “ that my uncle Jerningham’s generosity has put me into the present possession of a sum, that would enable us, with œconomy, to enjoy all the real blessings of life; and beyond these neither of us would form a wish.”

‘ Alas!’ replied Mary, after a pause, whilst the tear trembled in her eye, and a deep sigh burst from her bosom, “ it must not be. No! generous youth, ill should I deserve that good opinion with which you are pleased to honour me, and which I will candidly acknowledge I am proud to possess, if I could for a moment listen to the selfishness of my

affection, and permit you to sacrifice, for my sake, the regard of your father, and your future prospects in life. Ill would it become a friendless orphan, beggar in all but virtuous principle, to turn viper in the generous bosom that had fostered her, and wound it in so tender a part as the destruction of a son's felicity. No, Edmund, my honour forbids the thought ; and let me add, my regard for yourself, and my devotion to that angel your mother, who has been my tenderest benefactress, friend, and parent, loudly prohibit such base ingratitude.'

“ Oh! Mary,” exclaimed Edmund with violent emotion, “ forbear to utter such distressing words. If any regard for *my* felicity has influenced this determination you have just expressed, recal it, I beseech you ; for, here I most solemnly declare, that if the cruelty of my fate should make it impossible for

me to call you *mine*, I would instantly and for ever renounce that country which contained a treasure that I had long enjoyed in *idea*, but of which malignant fortune had denied me the *real* possession. Yes, bewitching girl," continued he, drawing a picture from his bosom, which she perceived was a miniature of herself, "believe your faithful Edmund, the most delightful visions of his heart have long been those which had the original of this portrait for their object. It was penciled by myself, when first I quitted home for the University, and has ever since been the constant companion of my bosom. Not that my faithful memory required such a monitor to keep alive its recollection of your charms and virtues: no! the image of the bright original had been too long and deeply impressed upon my heart for either time or distance to obliterate it; but the dear resemblance has often

soothed the pains of separation, and lent strength to fancy, when her thoughts have stretched to Herbert-Lodge. Nor think, angelic girl, that my dearest mother would oppose the union of those whom she so fondly loves : no, I know too well the generosity of her soul, to believe for a single moment that any false ideas of worldly interest would raise an obstacle to our happiness. She estimates the value of your excellence too well to allow the vain and accidental circumstances of birth and fortune to weigh a grain against their solid worth. Listen then to your devoted Henry, and allow him to hope that you will accept his vows."

The affecting fervour of Henry's manner was irresistible; Mary's bosom throbbed with tender emotion; her tears flowed fast; and whilst he pressed her to his breast, she softly whispered—

‘Edmund, my heart is *yours*—would it were more worthy of your love.’

The candid declaration was received by the generous youth with grateful rapture; Edmund, in terms of extacy, acknowledged the inestimable value of the gift, and vowed eternal attachment to the idol of his soul with an honest ardour that was to Mary a sufficient pledge of its sincerity.

As they returned towards the house, Edmund undertook, at Mary’s request, to communicate to Mrs. Herbert the result of their conversation, as soon as his father should set off for London, which he intended to do in a few days; for she considered it to be the duty of them both not to conceal a matter of so serious a nature from her knowledge, but at the same time found herself utterly unable to the task of disclosing it.

It is probable, however, that Mrs. Herbert would have discovered the cir-

cumstance, even before Edmund had caught an opportunity of apprizing her of it, from the embarrassed manner of Mary and himself, had not her attention been entirely engrossed by the alarming situation of Lady Antoinette.

The fatigue of the party on the preceding day, it appeared, had been too much for her enfeebled state; and induced a restless feverish night, which had been succeeded towards morning by a succession of fainting fits, pronounced by the medical gentleman who was called in to be the harbingers of quickly approaching death.

All, therefore, was bustle and confusion, when they returned to the Lodge. Mr. Herbert, half distracted at the prospect of losing an object, who had for years secretly enjoyed his affections, and returned the sentiment, hurried wildly over the house in search of means to arrest that fate, which, though conscious

it could not be averted, he was still unable to contemplate as certain.

Mrs. Herbert, with unaffected sorrow at the situation of Lady Antoinette, calmly gave the necessary directions, and kindly administered those attentions which she thought would most conduce to the solace of the sufferer; whilst Matilda sat by her bed-side, endeavouring to divert her mind from the thoughts of that awful event which she well knew must soon take place, with her customary gay conversation, agreeable sallies, and lively remarks.

But, alas! they had now no charm for Lady Antoinette; she tried to listen to them, indeed, that her attention might be occupied, and her thoughts diverted from a subject on which she had never hitherto allowed her reflection to dwell; but all in vain. Nature and conscience imperiously demanded their tribute; and whilst the one presented to her imagina

tion the sorrows of separation from all that she had loved, and valued, and esteemed; the other arrayed before her soul the dreadful views of a hereafter, and the terrors of that punishment which her licentiousness and folly had so well deserved.

With a force which her emaciated state could scarcely have been thought to supply, she grasped the hand of Matilda, as if anxious to be saved from the seizure of that frightful spectre, whose contemplation, whenever it had accidentally crossed her fancy, had only excited images of horror; and whose near approach she now beheld with unnutterable dread.

Her eye, which glared with despair, was turned on Mrs. Herbert, (who had entered the room, and stood at the bottom of the bed,) with a look that at once evinced the tempest of her soul, and seemed anxiously to solicit for means of

relief. In the mean time all her efforts to express herself in words were ineffectual, and only died away in feeble moans; whilst every moment her respiration became more laboured and distressing.

Mrs. Herbert, exceedingly affected at the scene, approached the head of the bed, and gently taking the other hand of Lady Antoinette, dropped upon her knees, and offered up her prayers for mercy and acceptance.

The dying patient gazed at her with a wild enquiring stare, which evinced how unacquainted she had been with this branch of a creature's duty to its God.

Every moment she still breathed deeper, quicker, and with greater pain; large drops of sweat accumulated on her brow—she sank gradually lower in her bed; and a livid paleness crept upon her hitherto burning cheek.

At this instant, the door opened; Herbert rushed into the room, and threw

back the curtain at the bottom of the bed.

The sudden noise roused Lady Antoinette from the lethargy of dissolution; for the last time she opened her clouded lids, and directed them towards the spot from whence the noise proceeded. Herbert caught her eye—for a moment she stared at him with horror, affright, and detestation, and then uttering a piercing scream; fell back upon her pillow, and expired.

It was not till the evening of the same day, that any of the family saw Mr. Herbert, who had shut himself up in his room, as soon as he had discovered that Lady Antoinette was dead, and remained there without suffering any one to approach him.

At tea-time, however, he again appeared, and telling Mrs. Herbert he should set off early on the ensuing morning for London, he desired Ed-

mund would prepare to accompany him ; adding, that he would bring him down into the Forest again, as soon as the funeral of Lady Antoinette had taken place.

However disagreeable such an intimation might be to Edmund, under his present peculiar circumstances, he did not hesitate a moment complying with his father's wish. On the ensuing morning he was ready at an early hour ; and having bidden an affectionate adieu to Mrs. Herbert and Mary, and promised to write to them in the course of a few days, he followed him with apparent readiness into the chaise, and drove off for London.

In obedience to the directions of Mr. Herbert, the funeral of the late Lady Antoinette was conducted with the utmost pomp, and the corpse conveyed to Fitzmordaunt-Castle, in order to be entombed in the family vault.

The plumes nodded on the hearse, the banners waved in the air, and as the procession moved slowly on, the gaping multitude, which the sight had collected together, gazed in stupid wonder at the scene; but no tongue pronounced a blessing on the memory of the deceased; no orphans wept in her a departed parent; no poor man consecrated her bier with the tears of gratitude, for kindnesses bestowed by her hand; no widow sighed out that in Lady Antoinette she had lost her friend, protectress, or support. It was all chill admiration of the gaudy pageant; or silent contempt of the pride that dictated such senseless extravagance; the mortifying termination, as well as reward, of splendid vanity, and high-life profligacy.

“How envy’d, how admir’d, avails thee not;

“To whom related, or by whom begot.

“A heap of dust alone remains of thee;

“’Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be.”

For several days after their arrival in London, Edmund saw little of his father. Business of some important nature appeared to occupy his mind entirely, which called him from home from the moment after breakfast to a late hour at night; and even the short intervals of time that he spent with his son, were rendered exceedingly distressing to him, by the unusual taciturnity and unaccountable absence which he could not but perceive in Mr. Herbert.

As Edmund, however, had accidentally met with an old Oxford friend, on the very day of his arrival in the metropolis, the unpleasantness of his situation was greatly lessened by his passing a great part of that time, which would otherwise have been spent in the gloom of solitude, in the agreeable intercourse of an University companion.

They had pursued their studies together at Oxford, and Edmund had left

his friend Harcourt there a few weeks before, preparing himself for becoming a member of the Inner Temple; but certain family misfortunes having occurred, which rendered it necessary to alter his plans for the future destination of his life, Harcourt, since their parting, had dropped all thoughts of the bar, purchased a company in the — regiment of foot, and was now come to town on a short leave of absence, to take leave of his friends, previously to his sailing in the *Lively* transport with his company for Bombay.

At the lodgings of this gentleman Edmund had one day been dining *tête-à-tête*, and talking over past adventures, and future plans; when, after a loud rap at the door, a message was delivered to him, that Mr. Herbert wished instantly to see him at home on particular business.

Edmund obeyed the summons, and hurried to Grosvenor-square, revolving

in his mind as he went, the probable cause of being thus suddenly sent for.

Since their arrival in London, his father had scarcely mentioned the name of the Monsons, so that he had begun to flatter himself, that the decided manner in which he objected to the match, had induced Mr. Herbert to relinquish all idea of such a connection: his fears, however, now again revived; and he could not help apprehending, that the message was in some way or other associated with the detested subject. But he determined to act with the same firmness as before, and risque every thing, rather than sacrifice his principles and his love.

It was evening when he entered the hall of his father's house, which, instead of being gaily lighted up as usual, received only a faint glimmer, "a darkness visible," from a small candle that stood on the table; it afforded, however, sufficient light for him to distinguish

the figures of two or three ill-looking fellows, who were talking together in the middle of the hall, and whose appearance convinced him in a moment that they were not of the number of his father's smart domestics.

“ Mr. Herbert, sir, is in the library,” said the footman who let him in, with a tone and manner that convinced him all was not well. Edmund accordingly directed his steps to that room; and as he approached it distinctly heard his father talking loudly to himself, execrating his fortune, and pacing the apartment with furious steps.

He rapped gently at the door. ‘ Who is there?’ exclaimed Mr. Herbert, in a voice half-choaked with agitation.

‘ Your son, sir,’ replied Edmund.

“ Ah,” returned his father, unlocking the door, and catching him in his arms; “ welcome, my guardian angel; welcome, thou only hope that now re-

mains to thy wretched father, of succour and salvation."

Edmund's astonishment at these words rendered him for a few moments speechless; nor was the appearance of his father calculated to allay the wonder excited by his exclamations. His eye was wild and staring; his hair dishevelled; his waistcoat was open, and his handkerchief had been thrown from his neck. Fragments of letters, torn in the wildness of passion, were scattered over the carpet, and on the table lay a brace of cocked pistols.

"For heaven's sake," cried Edmund, "compose yourself, my dear sir, and explain to me the occasion of all this agitation and confusion; you must be well assured, that whatever my little service can effect is at your command."

'Charming youth!' exclaimed Herbert. 'Yes, I am convinced, my Edmund will not disappoint my hopes; nor he-

sitate a moment to give his father *life, liberty, and peace*. Oh! Edmund, without your aid I am ruined, blasted, and sunk for ever. My person is at this moment under arrest, and my goods in execution. Two days more must expose my situation to the town; my other creditors will come upon me; my estates will be foreclosed, and I shall be compleatly beggared. *One* door of escape still remains unshut, and *you* have the power of preventing it from being closed.'

"Name it," cried Edmund, very much affected.

'Charlotte Monson!' replied his father, and pausing for a moment, proceeded; 'Yes, Edmund, your consent to accept the hand of this young lady would at once relieve me from every embarrassment. *Her* father is my principal creditor; but anxious for the match between his daughter and yourself, he is willing, on its completion, to liquidate the whole

of his demand upon my estates, in lieu of part of Miss Monson's marriage portion, as well as to advance me an additional sum to discharge the execution which is just levied on my person and property. Tell me, Edmund; may I hope that you will *save* your father?"

"That I sympathise most feelingly in your distress, my dear sir, returned Edmund, 'heaven, which knows my heart, can witness; and that I would gladly relinquish even my life, to rescue you from ruin, I can with the most solemn truth assert; but ————."

'Don't drive me to distraction,' exclaimed Herbert, 'by a refusal. By heaven, I cannot bear it.'

"*Why* then, sir, will you impose a condition on me that I cannot fulfil? Why will you ask a proof of my obedience to you, which it is impossible for me to grant. My *principles* forbid the act; *they* will not suffer me to make a vow,

which my *heart cannot* confirm; for that, sir, is in the possession of another."

'As my mind foreboded,' interrupted Mr. Herbert, whilst his eyes flamed with indignation, and rage rendered his voice almost inarticulate; 'that syren Mary has stolen your affection from your father, and extinguished every principle of duty in your bosom. Curses light on her dissembling witcheries!'

"Oh! sir," cried Edmund, interrupting his father; "forbear, for heaven's sake, to couple Mary's name with baseness or dishonour. Her soul is generous as heaven itself, and pure as the spotless snow; nor is there a virtue that can adorn her sex, which does not burn, in all its lustre, within her gentle bosom. These are the only witcheries she possesses; but they have riveted a chain around my heart, that nothing can dissolve. No! sir; if fortune, life, and all that's dear, depended on the sacrifice of Mary, rea-

dily would I renounce them all, rather than relinquish her."

Herbert's whole frame shook with agitation; his face was pale, and convulsed with passion; and for a few moments he seemed to be incapable of utterance: but a storm of imprecations at length burst forth, involving himself, and every one connected with him; and concluding with the most bitter oaths, that he would not survive the infamy and disgrace of the publication of his ruin.

'Yes. cruel, ungrateful son,' said he, pointing to the pistols on the table; 'though your unkindness will not save your father from dishonour, there still remains a road by which I may escape the *consciousness* of my situation. *That* instrument shall settle all my difficulties.

"Good God!" cried Edmund, with horror and astonishment; "is it possible my father should for a moment entertain an idea so dreadful? What, sir, would

you rush uncalled into the presence of your GOD? Would you cut off, by self-destruction, all chance of better prospects *here*, and every hope of happiness *hereafter*? Dismiss, for heaven's sake, so horrid a resolve; nor perpetrate, even in imagination, an act irreparable and unpardonable. Surely, sir, there must yet be means by which your dishonour may be prevented. Is the ruin too wide to be repaired? Is there no one to whom you can apply for a temporary arrangement of these present difficulties, and thus get time for a complete adjustment of your affairs?"

'Alas!' returned Herbert, apparently much affected by the speech of his son, and calling to his assistance a flood of hypocritical tears; 'alas! where can I look for refuge and relief? Your poor parent, Edmund, has no friend to whom he could even confide his sorrows; much less to whom he could apply for the

large sum of six thousand pounds, which his necessities demand.'

"Yes, sir," replied Edmund, after a short silence, during which his bosom seemed to be agitated with different emotions. "Yes, sir, you *have* a friend, who both *can* and *will* assist you. You know, sir, the amount of my uncle's legacy exceeds by some few hundreds the sum which you require. Six thousand pounds of *that* are now at your disposal. Cheaply will a father be saved from *suicide* at the price of such a sum!"

'Oh, generous youth,' returned Mr. Herbert, once more throwing his arms around Edmund's neck, whilst his eye recovered its fire, and his voice its natural tone, 'forgive me for doubting for a moment your filial duty. No, no, your heart has never been estranged from me. Edmund is still my son, my noble son, who ever has deserved, and always

shall possess my love. Oh, how shall I express the gratitude I feel?"

"Sir," replied Edmund, with a firm and solemn tone, "refrain, I pray you, from acknowledgments; I have only done that which my *heart* told me it was right to do. The performance of *duty* is not *merit*, but *obligation*; and therefore has no pretension to thanks. Had I not made this sacrifice to a father's wants, my *conscience* would not have acquitted the omission. I have now satisfied the most imperious claim, the claim of duty; and though it has shipwrecked my own hopes, yet whilst I lament *their* destruction, I cannot regret *that act* which has occasioned it. Here, sir, is an order on my banker for the sum you want; but you must pardon me, if I at present retire, and endeavour to recover in solitude that tranquillity, which the events of this evening have so much disturbed." So saying, he quitted

the apartment, took his hat, and walked out into the street.

It was not till after Edmund had paced for some minutes in solitude up and down the square; that he was perfectly sensible of the greatness of the effort, and the importance of the sacrifice he had made; nor clearly discerned that the consequences of it were beggary to himself, and the complete prevention of his union with Mary.

The full result, however, of the transaction soon presented itself to his mind: He perceived the total destruction of all his golden hopes; the dispersion of every dream of happiness on which his imagination had fondly revelled, ever since he had discovered the enchanting secret that his passion was returned.

He saw also the necessity of his immediately adopting some employment for his occupation and support, as he felt it to be impossible that he should be

dependent upon a father, whose affairs were so embarrassed, and whose conduct had been so unwarrantable.

After much deliberation, *one* path, and only one, presented itself, which seemed to suit the circumstances of his situation; and whilst it gave him present subsistence and employ, held out the dim but pleasing prospect of his being able, at some future time, to claim the promise of his Mary's hand.

He had still a few hundred pounds remaining in his banker's hands; and Harcourt had informed him, there was an ensigncy in his own company to be disposed of. In an instant he resolved upon its purchase, and late as it was, immediately directed his steps towards his friend's lodgings, whom he fortunately found within.

Harcourt being apprized of his situation and resolution, engaged with the utmost satisfaction to manage the pur-

chase. This was effected on the ensuing morning, and by the post of that day, an order came for the captain and his new ensign to join the regiment at Chatham, and embark for Bombay.

To leave his country, perhaps for ever, without the benediction of his mother, and the farewell of Mary, was a wound to Edmund's heart, that gave him more acute pain than any of those circumstances had done which made his absence necessary; but the same principles of duty and honour that had borne him through the trying scene with his father, supported him under the pain of a separation, unsolaced by the blessings of his dearest friends.

Having therefore written in the most affectionate and cheering manner to Mrs. Herbert and Mary, accounted for his sudden entrance into the army by the loss of his property, (the *nature* of which, however, he did not explain,) and

acquainted them with his destination, and the name of the transport in which he sailed; he bade his father adieu, (whom he had apprized of his purchase,) and left the metropolis, with his friend Harcourt, for Chatham and his regiment.

CHAPTER V.

THEY only who have experienced the sudden and bitter disappointment of their dearest hopes, can conceive the shock that Mrs. Herbert received, and the grief that wrung the tender bosom of Mary, when the fatal packet from Edmund reached them.

The news at first seemed too terrible to be true, and for a few minutes they were inclined to doubt the reality of an event, whose severity their worst fears could not have anticipated.

But, alas, reflection soon convinced them of its certainty, and at the same time suggested to their bosoms all the sad variety of circumstances that accompanied and aggravated it; the dangers of the element on which he was embarked, the risks of the profession in which he had engaged, the chance of battle, and the fatal climate of the country whither he was bound.

Mrs. Herbert, however, had been too well disciplined in the school of sorrow, and drew her consolations from too high a quarter, to sink under the shock, afflictive as it was; and Mary, animated by her example, and conscious of her obligations to support the spirits of her inestimable friend, endeavoured to imitate her resignation, and compose her own mind.

Edmund had not even hinted in his letters, at the tender tie of mutual affection by which the hearts of himself

and his adopted sister were united ; and this she considered as a tacit injunction that she too should be silent on the subject.

Her bosom assured her there would be no breach of duty or of her gratitude to Mrs. Herbert, in forbearing to mention a circumstance, which, if divulged, might only occasion an additional pang to her protectress. To her own breast, therefore, she determined to confine it ; and conceal the grief that her soul experienced in the unexpected deprivation of the object of its most sincere attachment.

Matilda was incapable of sympathizing in the feelings of her mother and Mary on the present occasion. Vanity had benumbed every sensibility of her bosom ; and an arrogant affectation of singularity, and an avowed contempt of the common principles of human conduct, rendered her as unequal to the kind

office of solacing her friends, as she was incapable of sharing their affliction.

Indeed, her attention was at present too much engaged in concerns of her own, to allow her to pay the least attention to those of others.

Matilda had left the continent to accompany Lady Antoinette to England, with the utmost unwillingness. Her heart had there formed an attachment to a young English nobleman, violent as it was romantic, which endeared her favourite Paris more than ever to her, and increased the disinclination she would in any case have felt to quit its splendid dissipation.

The correspondence which they had settled with each other before their separation, had in some degree relieved her under the sorrows of it; but she still found a sad vacuity of mind in her New-Forest retreat, which neither letters nor meditation could effectually remove.

As some refuge from this state of terrible ennui, she determined to amuse herself in exercising the power of her charms on one of the few objects which offered an opportunity for the attempt; and soon singled out Sir Nimrod Heartley for her purpose; as a character, in her opinion, the most capable of any amount of being made ridiculous.

The Netley party had enabled her to commence her operations, since which time she had carried them on with so much success, that the baronet was now become her professed admirer and constant attendant.

Indeed it is not to be wondered at, that Sir Nimrod, whose intellect was of the commonest kind, and incapable of distinguishing between specious and solid excellence, should quickly have owned himself the willing slave of a fascinating female, who put forth all her charms to ensnare his heart.

Matilda, now nineteen, possessed all the attractions of beauty, and every grace, with which accomplishment could heighten their effect. Her form was perfect symmetry, her face and features faultless. She played, she danced, she sang, with exquisite skill. She spoke fluently all the modern languages; excelled in painting; and in the fanciful productions of ornamental work, displayed a taste which was not to be equalled.

Her conversation too was lively and entertaining, illuminated by the corruscations of a ready wit, seasoned with *sauce piquant* of irony and repartee, and rendered striking by a freedom of principle and boldness of remark, which, as they are happily but rarely met with in the female character, have an air of originality that renders them, for a short time, agreeable as well as imposing.

The beauties of Miss Herbert's *mind*, however, bore no proportion to the charms of her exterior.

The fine talents with which nature had endowed her understanding, had been either wasted or perverted; frittered away in minute attention to personal graces, or diffused upon subjects which gave a false direction to her principles, whilst they strengthened her passions, and debilitated her mind.

She had read much, but her reading had been of the worst kind; either those sickly works of fancy, the mushroom growth of affectation out of the ruins of nature, which, robbing the heart of every genuine feeling, implant in its room all the extravagances of a surreptitious sensibility; or those still more dangerous works of superficial philosophy, which under the delusive promise of emancipating the mind from prejudice, secretly sap the foundations of morality.

and religion; inspire a contempt for all the established notions of propriety; and demolishing all the received criterions of right and wrong, submit the direction of the conduct of life to the wildness of passion, the eccentricity of imagination, or the crude determinations of a perverted reason.

Quickly after Matilda's arrival at the Lodge, had Mrs. Herbert clearly perceived and deeply deplored these fatal consequences of her daughter's mismanaged education. To others, however, who were less observant, and less interested in her happiness, they were not so apparent; and the general sentiment of the neighbourhood pronounced Miss Herbert to be an enchanting girl.

Sir Nimrod's opinion of her was too obvious to be mistaken; and the artful return which Matilda made to his attentions, convinced not only the baronet, but every body else also, that his senti-

ments had found a favourable reception in her heart.

Mr. Herbert, who now returned to the Lodge, after some weeks absence, (during which he had contrived to dissipate a large proportion of the sum he had received from Edmund, and was almost as much necessitated as before,) rejoiced at the appearance of an attachment, which he had no doubt of being able to convert to his own advantage; and gave every possible encouragement to its growth. Successive invitations and constant parties brought Sir Nimrod and his daughter together almost every day; and as the hunting season had now commenced, and Matilda, who was an admirable horse-woman, frequently accompanied the baronet in the chace, his admiration of the lady gradually increased into a sort of adoration.

Herbert immediately perceived that it was time to bring his plans into action;

he therefore in a tete-a-tete dinner with Sir Nimrod gave him an opportunity of declaring himself; and having promised him the acquiescence of himself and Mrs. Herbert, and all their influence with the young lady, observed, that it was his wish to do every thing that might be considered as liberal on his daughter's marriage; he had therefore determined to divide his estates between his son, and daughter Matilda, after the death of himself and wife; and in the mean time, if he could purchase two farms in the neighbourhood of Herbert Lodge, *that* estate (which was intended for Matilda's share) would be hereafter incalculably more valuable, *to Sir Nimrod and his heirs*, than it was at present. The purchase-money could not be more than ten thousand pounds; and if Sir Nimrod would advance it to him, he might have any security for the same most agreeable to himself.

The baronet, who was a monied man, and in a temper at present not to regard pecuniary concerns, readily agreed to make the advance; receive Mr. Herbert's bond as a security; and pay the money on the day of his marriage with his daughter.

Full of triumph at the success of his schemes, Mr. Herbert made his excuses to Sir Nimrod for an early departure, and repaired to the Lodge, in order to prepare Matilda for a formal declaration of the baronet's proposals, and to ensure her consent to the match.

She was alone in the parlour when he returned, engaged at her tambour-frame, tracing a beautiful pattern over the muslin that was stretched upon it.

"What," said Herbert, entering the room, "are you preparing your wedding-gown, Matilda? and meditating in solitary sadness, at the approaching change in your situation?"

‘No, sir; my *vestal robe*, for the state of celibacy, to which I perceive I am to be doomed, amongst the stags and hinds of this *bewitching* forest.’

“I should rather be inclined to believe, Matilda, you mean it for the *web of Penelope*; a project to delay the nomination of him who is to be the happy man, out of the *numerous* impatient suitors by whom you are surrounded.”

‘Why, indeed, sir, the croud of dying swains is so *large* and so *importunate*, that I find it absolutely necessary to adopt some device, to continue to preserve the *free agency* of an unmarried life.’

“True, Matilda: I have perceived ever since my return to the Lodge, your *embarrassment* in this respect, and therefore earnestly recommend to you, as the *deed of matrimony* must be perpetrated sooner or later, to plunge into the gulph immediately; and rid yourself of farther

plague and trouble, by commissioning Sir Nimrod Heartly to do the honours of dismissing all your other admirers."

'Admirable advice, Sir, I must acknowledge; and were it to my taste to sit at the head of a table of noisy fox-hunters, to preside at village card-clubs, and dance the first minuet at sessions balls, I would most willingly adopt your hint, and name Sir Nimrod for my own true knight.'

"And a very desirable pre-eminence too, I think, Matilda. Why, child, an union with Sir Nimrod would lift you into the highest rank of New-Forest fashions; and in due time, I have no doubt that you would see yourself at the county assizes in the envied situation of the *Sheriff's Lady*. But to lay aside the joke in which we have been indulging, I confess to you, my dear, it has not escaped my observation, nor has it given me a trifling degree of pleasure to ob-

serve, that Sir Nimrod's attentions to you evince the most sincere attachment, and that *you* receive them with a very flattering satisfaction. To be candid with you, he has confided his sentiments respecting you to *me*, and authorized me unequivocally to declare them to you."

'Ha! ha! ha! the old widower does me infinite honour, indeed; and I feel the most profound gratitude for the exquisite obligation which his good opinion imposes on me. But as I feel no violent inclination to spend my days in the agreeable employment of a *nurse*, I must beg leave *unequivocally* to wave the compliment he intends me.'

"Sprightly enough, I must confess, child; but not quite to the purpose. Indeed, I wish you *now* to be a little serious; and as your behaviour to Sir Nimrod has convinced me that his attentions are decidedly agreeable to you, I feel very anxious that *my worthy friend*

may be made happy, by hearing a circumstance that would be so gratifying to him, confirmed by your own lips."

'Upon my word, sir; you have the compleatest command of countenance, that any one was ever blest with.'

"I tell you, Matilda," replied Mr. Herbert, with much warmth, "I am most solemnly serious in what I say; and that I think your present levity highly unbecoming."

'And is it possible, sir,' returned Matilda, 'that you have *not* been jesting all this time? Could you for a moment entertain the monstrous idea that Sir Nimrod Heartley should be agreeable to Matilda Herbert?'

"What else could I infer," cried her father, in an elevated tone, "from the complacency with which you have received his attentions?"

'My dear sir,' said Matilda, 'it should seem from this question, that you were

not aware that *coquetry* is the privilege of our sex; and that women have a *right* to amuse ourselves with the *weakness* of their *tyrants*, whenever they have an opportunity of doing so; surely *this* is but a fair return for the despotism *they* exercise over *us*, as soon as we place ourselves under their controul.'

"Matilda," exclaimed Herbert, "*I* will not be trifled with; neither can I allow my *daughter* to amuse herself at the expence of *my friend*. You have given Sir Nimrod every reason to think he has rendered himself agreeable to you. This encouragement has engaged his affections. He has made to me the most honourable and advantageous proposals; and I *insist* upon it, that no senseless levity on your part may now prevent me calling him *my son*."

'What, sir,' returned Matilda with spirit, 'do you wish me to believe, that you would *force* the inclinations of a

woman in such an important affair as matrimony; and degrade her to the level of a horse at a fair, to be sold to the best bidder, and led away with a bridle in her mouth? Is this consistent with those principles which I have so often heard you assert, of the rights of women, the independency of our sex, and its equality in society with your own? Assure yourself, sir, I have formed juster estimates of the *dignity* of our character, and know too well the *natural* right we have to dispose of our hearts and hands according to our inclinations, to allow any authority to supersede the privilege.'

Mr. Herbert coloured with indignation, but curbing his displeasure as much as possible, he replied, "where you have acquired such notions as these, Matilda, I do not know; certain I am, however, you never heard from me any thing that might teach you to think lightly of

a *father's power*. This power I now mean to exercise: and I give you solemn warning, that if in the course of three days you do not acknowledge it, by acting on the present occasion, in conformity to my wishes, this house shall no longer harbour such an ungrateful and insolent child."

Saying this, he darted a fierce and threatening look at her, and hastily quitted the apartment.

Matilda knew her father's disposition sufficiently well, to be fully satisfied that he was serious in what he said, and would without hesitation execute the threat he had thrown out.

It was therefore necessary she should determine quickly on some plan of conduct, that might avert the dreadful alternatives by which she was surrounded; either of being an outcast from her father's house, or (a still more horrible evil) of becoming Sir Nimrod's wife.

To a mind like hers, dissimulation was soon suggested as an effectual resource ; and she resolved to conciliate Mr. Herbert, by pretending to have been wrought upon by what he had said, and to agree to receive Sir Nimrod as her professed admirer, reserving to herself the right of nominating the period when the union should take place.

By adopting this plan, she was aware that she should at least gain time ; and as Mr. Herbert talked of returning to Paris early in the ensuing year, she flattered herself that some accident or other might, in the interval, put an end to the engagement between Sir Nimrod and herself ; and enable her to go back with her father to that enchanting spot, in which her hopes, her affections, and her happiness had long been centered.

Should she, however, be disappointed in the expectation of Sir Nimrod's attachment dying gradually of itself, or being

scared away by her adopting such conduct as she should discover would be most calculated to alarm him ; or if she found that her father and the baronet pressed her for an earlier completion of the union than she should herself appoint ; she then determined upon the last resource of a persecuted virgin, to fly from her oppressors at home, and to throw herself into the protecting arms of her own true knight at Paris.

Before the time fixed for forming her final resolution, Matilda communicated to Mr. Herbert her determination to receive Sir Nimrod as the person intended for her future husband, and authorised him to impart the same to the baronet.

However gratified her father might be with the information, his satisfaction was but a cold emotion, when compared with the exultation of Sir Nimrod upon the occasion. It seemed to have electrified his whole system, and infused into

him immediately a spirit of animation and gallantry, that gave him the appearance of a new man. It even induced him to relinquish for upwards of a week his favourite sport, and to spend every day at the feet of the fair mistress of his affections.

The Lodge now became a scene of constant festivity. All the neighbourhood, far and near, were collected together by Herbert's vanity, in parties quickly succeeding each other, to meet his son-in-law, the wealthy Sir Nimrod Heartley; and to envy the happiness of his daughter, who was shortly to become mistress of seven thousand pounds per annum.

The prospect of the secret advantage which he was to derive from the event, put him into the highest spirits, made him lavish in his expressions of affection to Matilda, and even drew from him

occasional symptoms of kindness and complacency towards Mrs. Herbert and Mary.

Little, however, did they avail to cheer the spirits of his wife and her adopted daughter, or to banish the painful recollections that filled their bosoms.

Their thoughts were still directed towards the absent Edmund; and whilst the tenderest parental anxiety pressed down the heart of Mrs. Herbert, the soft sentiment that Mary entertained for the departed youth sank her gentle spirit into a state of depression, that none of the gaieties could interest or remove.

She carefully, however, endeavoured to conceal the emotions of her bosom from every one, particularly Mrs. Herbert, who, she perceived, already suffered her full share of sorrow. But this suppression of her feelings, with the effort of appearing cheerful under the pangs

of a wounded spirit, now became too much for her strength; and her fond protectress had the additional pain of perceiving that the estimable girl was gradually sinking into a state of health at once distressing and alarming.

Mrs. Stanmore, who, with her family, frequently visited at the Lodge, made the same observation; and, (at the request of her daughter Harriet, who was exceedingly attached to Mary Wheatley) proposed to Mrs. Herbert that her young friend should accompany them in an excursion to Bath, where Mr. Stanmore was to take them for two or three months, in the ensuing week.

Mrs. Herbert heard the proposal with the utmost satisfaction, and though Mary would rather have remained at the Lodge to indulge in secret that melancholy, whose source she could not disclose; yet as she perceived that Mrs. Herbert

wished her to accompany the Stanmores, she immediately accepted the offer with every expression of gratitude for the kind friendship that had prompted it.

CHAPTER VI.

EVERY necessary arrangement being soon compleated, Mr. and Mrs. Stanmore, Harriet, and Mary, quitted the manor; and after a long and not unpleasant journey, arrived in Milsom-street, where apartments had been engaged for their reception.

The change of air, and the use of the waters, produced an almost instantaneous alteration for the better in Mary's health; an effect which the novelty of the scene also greatly assisted in promoting.

It was now the commencement of the gayest season in this region of gaiety; and to her who had never been accustomed to the sight of other objects than those presented to her notice in the Forest, Bath afforded perpetual sources of wonder and admiration.

The elegance and taste of the buildings which comprized the modern part of the city; the picturesque scenery of the surrounding vallies; the variety and splendour of the public amusements; and the polished society to which she found herself introduced; presented to her mind a combination of pleasing novelties, that awakened new trains of ideas in it; gave wings to the passing hours; and left her nothing to wish for, except the society of her dear protectress, from whom she was now for the first time separated; and the presence of that youth, whose image was never absent from her heart.

Amongst the numerous visitors who welcomed our little party to Bath, was Mr. Fortescue, a gentleman Mary had occasionally seen at Herbert-Lodge, during the period of her childhood; but of whom she had almost lost the recollection, as he had been absent from England some years on his travels.

The memory of Mr. Fortescue, however, was not so treacherous.

His heart immediately recognized the full-blown perfections of that form and mind, whose budding beauties had charmed him even in their earliest shoots; and he instantly became their willing captive.

Possessed of a fine and highly-cultivated understanding, joined to a most pleasing form, Mr. Fortescue was also endowed with an exquisite sensibility, which rendered him peculiarly susceptible of tender impressions from the lovely and the amiable; accompanied,

however, by a refined delicacy, severe in exacting all those gentle qualities, and modest retiring virtues, which are the proper characteristics of the female sex.

He had travelled much, and lived long in foreign countries; circumstances that served to confirm his previous sentiments on this subject, and made him a fastidious observer of the minutest points of female conduct; so that though he had frequently been led by his quick sensibility into sudden admiration, he had never, till he saw Miss Wheatley, discovered, on a nicer inspection of its object, that all those excellences were centered in it, which he deemed essential to the character of perfect loveliness.

Mr. Fortescue's mind being stored with a fund of useful and entertaining information, the result of much observation and elegant study, he could not be otherwise than a most agreeable acquisition to Mr. Stanmore's party.

To Mary his attention was particularly directed; whilst she, in the artless simplicity of an unsophisticated heart, acknowledged the pleasure and gratification which his conversation afforded her, with an animated gratitude, that was construed by the enthusiastic Fortescue into a preference in his favour; and confirmed more strongly in his bosom that tender sentiment for Miss Wheatley, which the beauty of her person and the amiableness of her disposition had already inspired.

Mrs. Stanmore also, from the apparent pleasure with which Mary listened to Mr. Fortescue's conversation, and the friendly familiarity of her manner to him, began to entertain the idea that he was not indifferent to her affections; and as her knowledge of him convinced her of his worth and excellence, she was sincerely desirous that she might not be mistaken in her opinion.

Aware of his particular and refined notions on many subjects connected with conjugal felicity, she believed he must necessarily be unhappy, if he formed an union with a female, whose mind was not as pure as the snow; her manners soft and feminine; and her every sentiment delicate and intellectual.

In these particulars Mary was every way qualified to suit him; and on the other hand, as Mr. Fortescue's fortune was considerable, and her young friend's situation dependent, she thought herself authorized secretly to indulge an hope, that a connection might take place, which appeared to be so desirable for both parties.

As this point, however, was one of the utmost importance, and intimately connected with the future happiness of Mary's life, she avoided every attempt to bias her inclinations on the subject; and endeavoured as well to conceal her suspi-

cion of Mr. Fortescue's attachment, as her anxiety that the fair object of it might accept his proposals, if offered.

Thus days and weeks passed on in rapid succession; each as it arrived bringing with it some fresh engagement either in public or at home.

But every succeeding one seemed less agreeable to Mary than the former.

Repetition robbed them of their novelty; and deprived of this, they were stripped of every charm.

She began to compare her present occupations with those she had left behind her at Herbert-Lodge; the fantastic follies of art and fashion, with the joys and employments of rural simplicity and genuine nature; and secretly languished to retire from scenes, where folly and vice, contending for empire, were so often blended, that a superficial observer would often find it difficult to determine,

to which of the tyrants they might be said to belong.

Even the theatre, which she had occasionally heard represented as the school of pure morals, chaste taste, and proper sentiment, appeared to Mary's ideas to have entirely changed its character, and perverted its original intention.

Folly, instead of being scourged or ridiculed, seemed here to rule with absolute dominion; too frequently waving her cap and jingling her bells, in open defiance of decency and common-sense; whilst virtue, indignant at the neglect which she so long experienced, had fled the place, with Shakespeare's muse, and resigned her seat to pantomime absurdities, and the gaudy hopus-pocus of genii and fairies.

Perhaps, however, the distaste and weariness which were thus gradually creeping on her mind, had more secret causes than the dulness of frequently-

repeated pleasures; and might be in a still greater degree attributed to the painful state of suspense by which her bosom continued to be agitated, from the uncertainty of Edmund's present situation.

Of late, too, her anxiety had been increased by the unusual silence of her only correspondent Mrs. Herbert; as she had now been several weeks absent from the Lodge, and during the last fortnight no letter had reached her.

This two-fold solicitude preyed upon her spirits; and she would gladly have avoided entering into those amusements which were now become irksome to her, had she not perceived it was impossible to decline accompanying her friends, without making them partakers of the uneasiness which she endured.

The change in her feelings, indeed, had not entirely escaped the penetration of Mrs. Stanmore, who was nearly as un-

easy at Mrs. Herbert's silence as Mary, but had forborne, like her, to speak upon the subject.

One evening, however, when the family party, which now constantly included Mr. Fortescue, had assembled round the fire, having observed an unusual degree of thoughtfulness on the brow of her young friend, which seemed to shed its influence over the rest of the company; Mrs. Stanmore proposed that they should try by the power of music to dissipate the sombre cloud, preparatory to their appearance at Lady Ponto's rout, where she assured them "such Melpomene countenances were not likely to render them welcome guests."

With too much diffidence to obtrude her accomplishments, Miss Wheatly was at the same time unacquainted with that affectation which delays compliance, merely that it may enhance the obligation; and therefore, with the utmost

readiness and good-humour, drew her harp towards her, and threw her fingers over its strings with wild but exquisite taste, as a prelude to her harmony.

Instead, however, of the lively airs she had been accustomed to indulge them with, and which would best have accorded with Mrs. Stanmore's wishes; she yielded to the impulse of the moment, and poured forth with the most affecting pathos the following lines:

“ Amynta, mistress of my faithful heart,

“ Deep on its folds thy image is impress'd;

“ Tho' never yet I ventur'd to impart

“ The fervent passion glowing in my breast:

“ The sentiment, 'tis true, ne'er liv'd in speech;

“ For words refuse to paint what mocks expression's

“ reach.”

The words and air were both compositions of Edmund, and Mary recollecting how often she had sung them accompanied by his flute, felt her spirits painfully

agitated by these recalled images of the past.

A sigh heaved her bosom; her eyes were suffused with tears; and she struck the chords of her harp with a feeling that vibrated on the hearts of her auditors, and kept them still in mute attention, even after the harmony had ceased.

Mr. Fortescue, who had been leaning on the back of her chair in silent rapture, suddenly starting from his position, passionately exclaimed:

“By heaven it is the most exquisite melody I ever heard. These indeed are ‘sounds that take the prison’d soul, and lap it in Elysium.’ Charming Miss Wheatley,” added he, pressing her hand to his lips, “true, too true it is, that words can but faintly express the sentiment *you* were born to inspire.”

His voice faltered; and drawing his handkerchief across his eyes, he turned to the window to conceal his emotion.

“Faith,” whispered Mr. Stanmore to Mary, “it requires but little penetration to discover the havock you have made in that poor fellow’s heart.

“Were he an *every-day* lover, I should advise you to relinquish this woe-begone countenance for your accustomed Hebe smiles; but so romantic is the taste of Ferdinand Fortescue, that the tear of sensibility possesses charms for him, which he would never find in the dimpled cheek of the laughter-loving dame; and in fact, my dear girl, were I to give you ten thousand lessons, you could not render yourself more attractive or more amiable than you are at present.”

Mary was prevented from replying to this speech by the entrance of a servant, who announced the carriage to be in waiting; and by Mrs. Stanmore immediately summoning the party to attend their evening engagement.

The blaze of splendour that issued from the apartments of Lady Ponto's elegant mansion; the superb decorations of the rooms, and the brilliant assemblage of beauty and fashion which they contained, diverted for a moment Mary's attention from those subjects which had lately occupied it.

Notwithstanding, however, the gaiety that surrounded her, and the efforts she made to rally her spirits, she soon again felt them to be oppressed by a weight, which she was equally unable to account for or resist.

She followed Mrs. Stanmore through the crowded rooms, with pensiveness and indifference; nor could the multitude of apparently happy countenances which she saw on every side, inspire her with a single chearful idea.

The present serious frame of her mind communicated a tint of gloom to the scene before her, which seemed to rea-

lize the melancholy but admirable picture that the poet had painted of these motley assemblies:

“The rout is folly’s circle—

“And ’tis a fearful spectacle to see

“So many maniacs dancing in their chains.

“They gaze upon the links that hold them fast,

“With eyes of anguish; execrate their lot,

“Then shake them in despair, and dance again.”

Two antiquated female figures, whose wrinkled brows and palsied heads might have entitled them to be considered only as a *memento mori* to the surrounding groupe, were engaged together at whist against a clergyman, who, with his partner, formed as striking a contrast to their antagonists in appearance, as they were opposite in reality.

Mrs. Cassino, though not young, was still beautiful, and a perfect adept in the science to which she had long been devoted; and Dr. Shuffle, whose sacred function could not shield him from the

fascinating influence of play, being equally versed in all its necessary mysteries, few were found who would engage so formidable a couple at the card-table.

Their present adversaries, however, were of the number of those unfortunates, who, having outlived all the transient advantages of youth and beauty, without providing against that period when less perishable qualities are requisite to prevent the female character from sinking into insignificance, have no other sources of comfort but cards and scandal, and are content to purchase the privilege of being admitted into the circles of elegance and fashion, even at the risk of no inconsiderable pecuniary loss.

Mary stood for some time observing this extraordinary group, and while she contemplated the novel character of a clerical gambler, sincerely lamented, that one whose office it was to regulate

the conduct of others, should make so public an exhibition of vice in his own.

Turning at length with disgust from this party, her attention was attracted by another not less remarkable, though of a different description.

At this table two young and very lovely girls were engaged at cassino with the most earnest avidity.

The star and the ornamented ribbon that decorated their respective partners, marked their superior rank ; whilst their captivating smoothness of manners, significant glances, and studied attentions, sufficiently evinced, that their designs were aimed at the persons, and not the purses, of their fair opponents.

The stake was high, the game at the most interesting point, and the apparently successful female already exulted in certain victory ; when treacherous fortune, shifting her smiles, decided at one stroke in favour of her adversary.

The gentlemen, whose thoughts were bent on more important conquests, betrayed no symptom of surprize at this sudden reverse; but the countenances of the fair combatants underwent an instantaneous metamorphosis.

Triumphant pleasure now illuminated those features, which, a moment before, had expressed only anxiety and vexation; whilst anger darted from the eye, and had it not been pre-occupied by rouge, would have flushed into the cheek of the loser, whose quivering lip scarcely refrained itself from uttering the rage and disappointment with which her heart seemed bursting.

“By St. Patrick, now,” exclaimed an old Irish officer, who stood near Mary, “there is nothing in nature to me so hateful as the sight of a young and pretty female pouring over those bits of painted paper.

“A card-party, like the cave of Trophonius, instantly converts the cherub smiles of the dare creatures into a gravity of countenance that belongs only to their great grandmothers.

“Arrah, now, how *ugly* does a *beautiful* girl appear, when she is either grieving at her own losses, or triumphing over those of her less fortunate friend.”

‘Although I certainly agree with you as to play in general, Sir O’Callaghan,’ replied an elderly gentleman, (whose benevolent countenance and urbanity of manners had already attracted the notice of our party;) ‘yet as those persons who have no resources in their own minds, must have occupation of some sort, I think there are *exceptions* to our rule; and that cards may in some cases be allowed to be an *innocent* amusement.

‘Nay, indeed, I will go further, and assert, that they may now and then be made *useful* also.

“In support of my theory, I have at this moment a case in point; and will propose a pool at Commerce, where the winner shall be entitled to a work of ingenuity, the performance of one of the most engaging women in the world, (without any disparagement to the present lovely circle,’ added he bowing gracefully,) ‘and who has this additional claim upon our notice, of being *unfortunate* also. I hope, Sir O’Callaghan, in a case like *this*, you will neither contradict my reasoning, nor counteract my plan.’

“Now, Winburne,” returned the other, “don’t you *mane* the pretty emigrant who supports the old priest by the labour of her own delicate white fingers?”

Mr. Winburne answering in the affirmative, the knight continued.

“Oh! gentlemen, and ladies too, you will not, you cannot refuse your half-guineas on this occasion.

“ Even I, who have given up playing at all, at all, because I believe in my conscience that cards are one of the engines which the devil he wields for the destruction of us poor mortals; yet I will join the party.

“ Och! did you know the swate angel, you would not stand shill-I shall-I about it?”

‘ The charms of Madame Henri’s mind,’ replied Mr. Winburne, ‘ her engaging modesty, and unaffected elegance of manners, are even superior to the beauty of her person.’

“ Ah, my good friend,” said Sir O’Callaghan, “ if our young ladies knew the fascinating power that same modesty you spake of gives to beauty, they would, I am sure, bestow some little pains in its cultivation, instead of being so desirous, as too many of them *saam* to be, to root it out of their characters entirely, as a vul-

gar weed, unfit for polished society, and *gentale* life.

“ By my conscience, I hardly know what to do with my eyes, when I get amongst the modern female fashionables; they are enough to shame a *dacent* man out of countenance. Why they wear no more clothes than a mermaid.”

As he spoke, Sir O’Callaghan, by an arch glance, directed the eyes of his auditors towards the ladies of the Cassino party, whose style of dress too evidently proved they had little claim to the possession of that quality which the worthy knight deemed so estimable.

‘ Hush, hush,’ cried Mr. Winburne, smiling, ‘ were your observations to be generally heard, they would effectually ruin my pool of commerce.’

‘ *Here*, however,’ added he, turning to Mrs. Stanmore and her party, ‘ there is no danger of your having injured the cause of pity. You see, ladies, I pre-

sume to hope for your sanction and assistance.'

Never deaf to the call of beneficence, Mrs. Stanmore immediately acquiesced; and declaring, that on such an occasion, she could not even object against Mary and her daughter deviating from general rules, she followed the philanthropic Mr. Winburne to a commerce-table, where the prize was handed round for general examination.

It was a small work-box, with an exquisite painting on the lid, representing the parting of Hector and Andromache. A wreath of withered laurel surrounded the inside of the cover, and in the centre appeared an elegant female form, reclining against a broken Gothic column. At her feet lay a faded rose-bud, untimely snapped from its parent stalk. One of her arms resting on the pillar supported her head, whilst the other held a scroll with this inscription :

" Her Hector lost, the Trojan widow mourns,

" Yet in her infant's smiles has comfort left;

" Nor child, nor husband, e'er to me returns,

" Of hope and happiness alike bereft."

Powerfully interested by the affecting circumstances of the decorations of the box, and struck with the masterly style of their execution, Mary dwelt with silent delight on its examination.

She again closed the lid, and looking upon it once more with increased attention, thought she perceived a resemblance in the features of Hector, to a face whose recollection was always present to her fancy.

" Surely," said she to herself, "'tis the face of Edmund Herbert."

The discovery at once interested her in the fortune of the game; and she, who, but a moment before, had thought only of the benefit which Madame Henri would derive from the disposal of this

bagatelle, now became anxiously desirous of possessing it herself.

Fortune seconding her wish, Miss Wheatley was in a short time declared the winner of the pool, and with infinitely more satisfaction than she ever imagined such a circumstance would have afforded her, she took possession of the prize.

The stake of five guineas was in the mean time delivered to Mr. Winburne, who, having undertaken to convey it to Madame Henri, gave the following particulars of her situation to Mrs. Stanmore, as Mary and the younger part of the commerce-players were admiring and commenting upon the beauty of the box.

“ I have already described this unfortunate female,” said he, “ as one of the most elegant and amiable of women. She has certainly passed the meridian

of beauty, but is a lovely interesting Madona.

“ An attachment to a young Englishman in early life, it seems, drew on her the heavy displeasure of a despotic father, who with savage cruelty separated the affectionate pair, and immured his daughter in a convent.

“ She remained in a state of cheerless captivity, until the late revolution let loose a lawless multitude, who restored her to liberty, by destroying the convent in which she was confined.

“ But liberty had lost all its sweets to Madame Henri; and the world was but a desert to one who was probably torn for ever from all her soul held dear.

“ At this juncture, an old priest who had been the confessor of the convent, proposed to her to accompany him in his flight to England, where many of his brethren had already taken refuge.

“ Circumstances were urgent, and a prompt decision necessary.

“ Madame Henri therefore immediately acceded to his proposal, and the refugees in a few days were landed at Southampton.

“ From that town they came to Bath, in the hope of being able to procure a maintenance, by the confessor teaching French, and Madame Henri disposing of the productions of those accomplishments, which in happier days were only her amusements.

“ For a short time their plan succeeded, but at length the poor priest fell sick, (the consequence of mental anxiety and bodily fatigue,) and became incapable of any further exertions for his support.

“ Since this period, the generous woman has not only laboured with incessant diligence to procure the means of maintaining him, but has also attended him

with the most affectionate solicitude ; and though ill-health, and a naturally peevish and timid temper, render the old man at times but a melancholy charge, yet never for a moment has she relaxed in her attention or attachment to him.

“ Indeed, I have reason to believe, that she not unfrequently denies herself many little comforts, for the pious purpose of procuring those indulgences for the priest, which she thinks his advanced age and infirmities require.

“ He is now much reduced, and cannot probably long survive.

“ It will be an affecting stroke to poor Madame Henri whenever it happens, as she will lose a very early and a very sincere friend ; and, alas, she has none to spare.

“ However,” added he, his countenance glowing with benevolence, “ there is *one* human being, I trust, who has

both the inclination and ability to shelter this tender plant from the rude storms of the world, and to prevent her sinking under the pressure of distress.

“ But I have already, I fear, trespassed too long on your time and patience ; yet,” continued he, “ if I have been so fortunate as to interest a lady of Mrs. Stanmore’s merit and respectability in favour of my fair friend, I shall scarcely repent having drawn her attention from her party, who, I can readily believe, would on any other terms find it difficult to pardon my selfishness.”

Whilst Mr. Winburne was yet speaking, Mary had unavoidably overheard part of a conversation between a group of politicians near her, who were discussing with great earnestness some recent important intelligence.

The words “ transports, Bombay, prisoners, slain, sunk, &c.” had both caught her attention, and awakened her fears ;

and feeling unable to repress a curiosity which her anxiety on Edmund's account occasioned, she requested Mr. Fortescue's assistance to obtain the particulars of what she had so partially heard.

He accordingly joined the circle, which was now every moment increasing, and there learned, that a private letter had been received by one of the gentlemen, which, in addition to some public news from the continent, mentioned also, that the fleet in which the late expedition sailed, had been attacked by the enemy, that a report prevailed of a smart action having taken place between the *Lively* and a French sloop of war, in which the latter was obliged to sheer off, after having killed and wounded several of the *Lively's* crew.

Mary could scarcely support herself whilst Mr. Fortescue related these particulars.

The Lively was the vessel which had conveyed Edmund from his native shore; and her heart sunk, and the colour forsook her cheek, when the possibility of his being included in the list of the slain or mutilated flashed upon her fancy.

Mrs. Stanmore observed the change in her countenance, and immediately enquired with anxious solicitude the occasion of her apparent indisposition.

Unwilling, however, to disclose the fears of her bosom, Mary attributed it to heat and fatigue, and requested that she might be permitted to return to Milsom-street; a wish Mrs. Stanmore instantly complied with, having first thanked Mr. Winburne for his interesting account of Madame Henri, and obtained a promise to be introduced to this amiable woman.

On reaching the lodgings, Mary retired to her chamber, where in silence and solitude the dreadful purport of

the conversation related to her by Mr. Fortescue pressed with tenfold weight upon her mind.

Whatever amusement she had derived from the various incidents of the evening, whatever interest had been excited by the little history of the unfortunate emigrant, however gratified she had felt on her unexpected acquisition of the desired prize, all were for a time annihilated by the news she had heard.

“Many had been killed and wounded;” and was it not probable that the ardour and gallantry of Edmund, forward in every service of honour, would compel him incautiously to expose himself, and thus render him more obnoxious to danger? And ah, if the fate of battle should have laid him low; (dreadful, insupportable idea!) whither then would his disconsolate mother turn for peace and comfort; and how would her own happiness be for ever blasted!

The bursting sigh and quickly falling tear evinced how deeply Mary's bosom was agitated by the fearful anticipations which her fancy had created.

She in vain tried to compose herself, and banish images that possibly had no existence in reality.

A vague and indistinct dread of impending evil continued to obtrude itself upon her mind; and when at length "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," weighed down her eyelids, the colours of her waking thoughts still tinged with their gloomy hues her short uneasy slumbers.

Sometimes she beheld Edmund stretched at her feet, breathing out the last remains of life in torturing agony; his mother weeping by his side; while his eye beamed upon them both the last look of affection, and his parched lips murmured an eternal adieu.

On a sudden, with that incoherence which marked the visions of the night, she found herself wandering in solitude amidst a dismal waste.

Whilst she trembled with secret horror at her forlorn situation, a lovely form appeared; 'twas Edmund's self. His eye spoke rapture, and his melodious voice bade her banish fear. She sprang forward to embrace him; he uttered a piercing groan, and sank lifeless in her arms.

Mary shrieking, awoke in horror; and for a moment, bewildered reason made her doubtful whether the sad visions she had seen, were merely the effect of a disordered imagination, or had their foundation in horrible truth.

The last sigh of Edmund still seemed to vibrate on her ear; and with "her mind's eye," she yet contemplated his breathless corpse.

Divesting herself, however, as much as she could, of the effects which these phantoms of the brain had produced, she dressed herself, and descended to the breakfast parlour.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. Stanmore was waiting below to receive her amiable young friend, and anxiously enquired, as soon as she saw her, whether her indisposition was removed.

Mary answered with a smile; but her countenance too plainly declared, that it was a forced one, and not the genuine offspring of her heart.

She, however, made every effort to lessen the solicitude of her friends on

her account; and had in a great degree dissipated the gloom, with which her foreboding fears and frightful dreams had overcast her mind, when a letter arrived, that in a moment converted imaginary evil into real affliction; and plunged her into a state of equal perplexity and distress.

The letter, which was a very long one, came from John Wheatley, who had written it to Miss Wheatley, in his mother's name, and at her desire and dictating.

It began with many apologies for the liberty she was taking, and excusing it, by saying, that as Dr. Fairford was absent from home, she had no one to whom she could apply under the present unhappy circumstances: it proceeded as follows:

“ Alas! dear and dearest Miss Mary, how can I, ignorant and unknowing as I be, find words to tell you what my worthy good lady has suffered?

“ To think that such an angel of a woman should be so afflicted, it almost breaks my heart.

“ ’Tis only the day before yesterday, when I was crying by her side, that she bade me dry my tears, and said, ‘ Have I received good at the hands of the LORD, and shall I not receive evil also with Christian resignation? Believe me, Dame, that for *myself* I feel but little. My *children*, indeed, and dearest Mary—and here she stopped, and sighed as if her heart would break.

“ Oh, dear miss, what *shall*, what *can* I do?

“ But to go on with the dismal story!

“ You know, that soon after you set out on your journey to Bath, the squire was taken ill. In short, (for madam did not like to make the worst of it to you,) as he was coming home from that Sir Nimrod Heartley’s, (who he intended should marry Miss Matilda, but there

she didn't like 'en, and no wonder, sure,) a' was sadly in liquor, and fell from his horse, and bruised himself almost to 'a mummy.

“ Madam was despartly frightened, but tended 'en with as much affection, as if a' had been the best husband upon earth; sat by his bedside, gi'd him all his physic, bore all his ill-humours with patience, and would so smile on the servants when master was swearing at their awkwardness, and assure 'em it was his great pain that made 'en so cross. Oh, she's a saint from heaven, that's sartain.

“ Well, miss; when a' lay at the worst, (for a' was in a burning fever, from the bad state of his blood,) and we did not know but 'a would die, what does Miss Matilda do, but *runs away* with some great gentleman, who, they say, has 'a carried her back to France.

“ Ah, I thought no good would come of sending the poor child beyond sea,

before she knew, as a body may say, her right hand from her left.

“ Well, off she went; and a terrible to do the squire made about it; and, no wonder; but then a’ should not blame *you*, nor abuse *me* for what I couldn’t know or prevent.

“ Yes, if you’ll believe me, dear miss, he sent for me to his bed-side, and told me, with such a glaring look as I shall never forget, that I was a wicked woman ever to have brought you to the Lodge; that your example (a’ said, a wicked man !) had corrupted Miss Matilda; that you’d seduced away Master Edmund from his duty to ’en; and a’ swore with a terrible oath, that you should never enter the doors of the Lodge again.

“ LORD! I thought I should a’ died when a’ talked in this way; and was so choaked with tears, that for some minutes I could not speak.

“ However, I thought I would try to mollify ’en a little, and began to tell ’en what a sweet child you had always been; but he wouldn’t hear me, but ordered the *old canting devil*, as a’ called me, to be turned out of the room.

“ There, God forgive ’en ; I’m sure I do, though I didn’t think at my time of life to be called such profane names.

“ In a day or two, the squire began to mend ; whilst poor madam, almost dead with fatigue and grief, (for a’ had told her the same as me,) looked piteously, and could hardly get about, though she wouldn’t complain, nor gi’ up tending master with the same care as ever.

“ One morning she had brought ’en his breakfast, and carried ’en at the same time a letter, which I believe came from Lunnon.

“ Poor madam and I only were in the room, and to be sure I never was so frightened in all my life.

“ He no sooner read ’en, than his face grew all manner of colours; he swore the most bitter oaths that ever were heard, beat his head wi’ his fists, and at last fell down in a fit.

“ I rang the bell, and sent for the potecary, while madam rubbed his temples with hartshorn, and got ’en into bed. I

“ But nothing would keep ’en there, as soon as he came to himself; and tho’ the doctor told ’en his life depended upon being quiet, a’ swore a’ would dress himself, and go immediately post to Lunnon.

“ After much persuasion, however, he consented to defer his journey till the next day, and took the composing draught that Mr. Phial prescribed, because, a’ said, it might perhaps make ’en stronger for his journey.

“ Madam hoped, and so indeed did the doctor, that he would forget his intention; but not a bit of it; he next

day ordered post-horses, and sure enough set off for town.

“ As soon as my poor dear lady heard the orders given, she tottered into the squire’s room, leaning on my arm, for she was so weak she couldn’t walk alone; and begged with tears, that a’ would not think of going in the state he was, or at least allow her to accompany him.”

“ LORD! my dear miss, what it is to be wicked, and to have a bad conscience.”

“ I’m sure I never saw so dreadful a countenance as the squire’s, when he cried, ‘ No, no, I’ve *ruined* you already; stay where you are. Don’t think of following me; for I’m resolved never to see you again, unless I can retrieve what I have *lost*, and save my family from *beggary*.’

“ Ah, my dear miss, nobody likes to speak out, but we a’ all along suspected, that the squire was a ruined man.

“ Mrs. Herbert had done all she could to save ’en ; and I am pretty sartain disposed of all her family jewels for that purpose.

“ The horses and carriages too have been sold since you went ; but the neighbours say he’s so much in debt to Jews and gamblers, that all his fortune would not clear ’en off.

“ Well, to Lunnon the squire went the day before yesterday, and left poor dear madam in a terrible state. She makes no complaint indeed, but looks so piteous, that it wrings my heart to see her. At nights too she’s quite delirious, and rambles on for hours about Mister Edmund and you.

“ The doctor calls the complaint narvous, and says she will be better soon ; but I’m frightened out of my wits at the very thought of losing her ; ’twould kill me, I’m sure, and many more besides.

“ ’Tis as good as a sarment to hear her talk of God’s goodness in sending us affliction in this world, that he may spare us in the next, and make us happy for ever.

“ Her chief trouble indeed is about you, and how you’ll bear the sad news she must soon acquaint you with.

“ She has to-day been wishing she were able to write to you, and means it as soon as she can. But I was willing to be before hand wi’ her, particularly as the doctor thinks it would go a great way to recover her, could she see one that she loves so much as yourself.

“ But this isn’t all our grief. For our John heard a report at market, this morning, that the ship Mister Edmund went out in, was sunk or taken, or som’at as bad, by them there vile enemies of every thing that’s good, the French.

“ I pray God it mayn’t be true, for ’twould kill dear madam outright. In-

deed a much less matter than that might now do it.

“ So no more at present from your loving friend and humble servant till death,

“ MARTH A and JOHN WHEATLEY.

“ P. S. I hope his reverence Dr. Fairford (God bless 'en!) will come back soon; we want 'en mainly just now. Jenny desires her duty.”

Every sentence of this simple letter was a dagger to the soul of Mary.

As she proceeded in its contents, a giddiness seized her head, her face became deadly pale, an universal trembling shook her limbs, the fatal paper dropt from her hand, and she fell back senseless on the sofa.

Mrs. Stanmore and her daughter ran towards her in the utmost alarm, and whilst the former applied hartshorn to

her temples and nostrils, Harriet in an agony of grief seized the passive hand of her insensible friend.

It was cold as ice. A death-like stupor sealed up all her faculties; far more affecting than the most violent grief. No beating pulse indicated the remains of life; the heart was still; the lip was pale; the eye was closed.

“For pity’s sake, speak to me; look on me, dear Mary!” cried Harriet Stanmore; “do not kill me by this horrible silence!”

“Do, my sweet girl,” interrupted her mother, who had cast her eye over the contents of the letter, ‘exert your powers, I beseech you. For our sake, for your own sake, for the sake of our afflicted and incomparable Mrs. Herbert, rouse yourself, and look upon us. She is already sinking under a weight of sorrow; oh! do not kill her quite!’

At the name of her beloved protectress Mary awakened to sense and recollection.

She raised her heavy eyes, and perceived Mrs. Stanmore hanging over her with the most affectionate solicitude.

She felt her tears drop upon the cheek she kissed; and saw her daughter also kneeling at her feet with clasped hands, and weeping eyes lifted up to heaven in silent ejaculation.

The affecting sight operated like a charm upon the generous girl.

A full sense of the sufferings of these tender friends; a conviction of Mrs. Herbert's lamentable situation; and the necessity there was of exertion on her own part, rushed at once into her mind.

She instantly rose, and throwing herself into Mrs. Stanmore's arms, "Forgive this weakness, dearest madam!" she cried, and burst into a salutary flood of tears.

Scarcely had the afflicted group recovered any degree of composure, when the door opened, and Mr. Fortescue was announced.

Mary, unable entirely to conceal her emotion, moved towards the passage, with an intention of retiring to her apartment; but was prevented by Mr. Fortescue, who, approaching her, respectfully took her hand, and with an agitation in his manner and countenance, which he had never before manifested, said, “Do not fly me, dear Miss Wheatley—Heavens, you are in tears! Oh! tax me not with presumption, if I intreat that I may know and share your sorrows!”

Silently endeavouring to disengage herself, Mary for a moment withdrew the handkerchief that concealed her face, and cast a supplicating look at Mrs. Stanmore, who addressing Mr. Fortescue entreated he would at present allow her

young friend to retire; adding in a lower tone, ‘Miss Wheatley has received some distressing intelligence from Hampshire, which makes it necessary that she should immediately return thither.’

“Oh! then,” replied Fortescue, with additional emotion, and in a more hurried tone, “the more loudly am I called upon to avow those sentiments, which I long have entertained for your angelic friend.”

“Yes,” continued he, turning to Mary, “I must speak; my happiness depends upon it. For heaven’s sake, quit me not, most amiable girl, till I account for thus abruptly declaring to you the secret of my soul. Within this hour has a summons reached me to repair to a dying relative, and receive his last injunctions; and the chaise now waits to carry me from Bath. But ignorant when and where I should again have the happiness of meeting you, I could not tear

myself away, without first seeking an opportunity of acknowledging the love, the adoration, which my bosom cherishes for Miss Wheatley; and intreating her permission to offer to her the purest vows of a heart on which her image is engraven, and to throw myself and fortune at her feet."

Mary, in speechless agony, hid her face in Mrs. Stanmore's bosom; who, pleased with the unexpected avowal which Mr. Fortescue had just so generously made, and perfectly ignorant of Mary's attachment to her adopted brother, secretly hoped this silent agitation of the lovely girl might not be an unpropitious omen to the wishes of her friend.

Mr. Fortescue, with the ardour natural to his character, drew a similar conclusion from her behaviour, and once more clasping Mary's hand,

"Enchanting Miss Wheatley!" he exclaimed, "again let me sue to you.

for pardon on my presumption. Again let me intreat you to believe, that my rashness would never have impelled me to so sudden a disclosure of my sentiments, had not this inevitable and unlooked for separation from you deprived me of all self-command. But let me not longer distress your delicacy; or further press a subject at present, which may increase an agitation, that I would give the world to soothe. I go, dearest girl; cheered with the hope, that when I have fulfilled the duties which call me hence, I may be allowed to solicit of Mrs. Herbert her consent to an union which can alone make existence desirable to me."

'Leave me not, Mr. Fortescue; leave me not, I intreat you, in so dangerous an error;' replied Mary, still unable to suppress her tears, yet struggling to speak with some appearance of composure.

'For worlds I would not deceive you, most estimable man. Believe me, my

heart swells with gratitude for this instance of disinterested goodness; but—alas! what return can a child of misery, as I am, make to so much generosity?”

“Dearest Mary, I ask but your love; nor could the world bestow a richer treasure.”

‘*Love!*’ she emphatically repeated, ‘to a heart oppressed like mine, love, Mr. Fortescue, must be a stranger. My friendship; my esteem; my every feeling that gratitude can inspire, are yours for ever; but press me not, I intreat, I beseech you, for any return, which I *cannot* make.’

With these words she hastily broke from his grasp, and instantly quitted the room.

To Fortescue, whose sensibility and delicacy were extreme, and whose attachment was as ardent and exalted as he painted it, this rejection of his addresses seemed a trial almost overwhelm-

ing, and for a moment he determined to banish himself for ever from Miss Wheatley's sight.

Mrs. Stanmore, however, who saw and pitied his distress; and who actually attributed the decisiveness of Mary's language to the agonizing state of her present feelings; endeavoured to soothe him again into hope, and to convince him that nothing she had said could be construed into a positive refusal.

She explained the circumstances that had taken place at the Lodge, and the effects they had produced on the sensibility of Mary; which accounted very naturally for the hurry and agitation of her spirits, and might also, not unreasonably, be supposed to have had some influence in suggesting her concluding words.

Mr. Fortescue gladly availed himself of Mrs. Stanmore's hint; and with feelings if possible of still greater admira-

tion of Miss Wheatley than before, he determined to continue those attentions, which additional motives now impelled him to hope might be eventually successful..

At present, however, he saw the impropriety of further urging his suit; and having engaged Mrs. Stanmore to be his willing advocate with her young friend, he took his leave with a flattering anticipation of future happiness, which, rising from the ashes of his late disappointment, shed a cheering ray in the gloom of this necessary separation from the object of his wishes.

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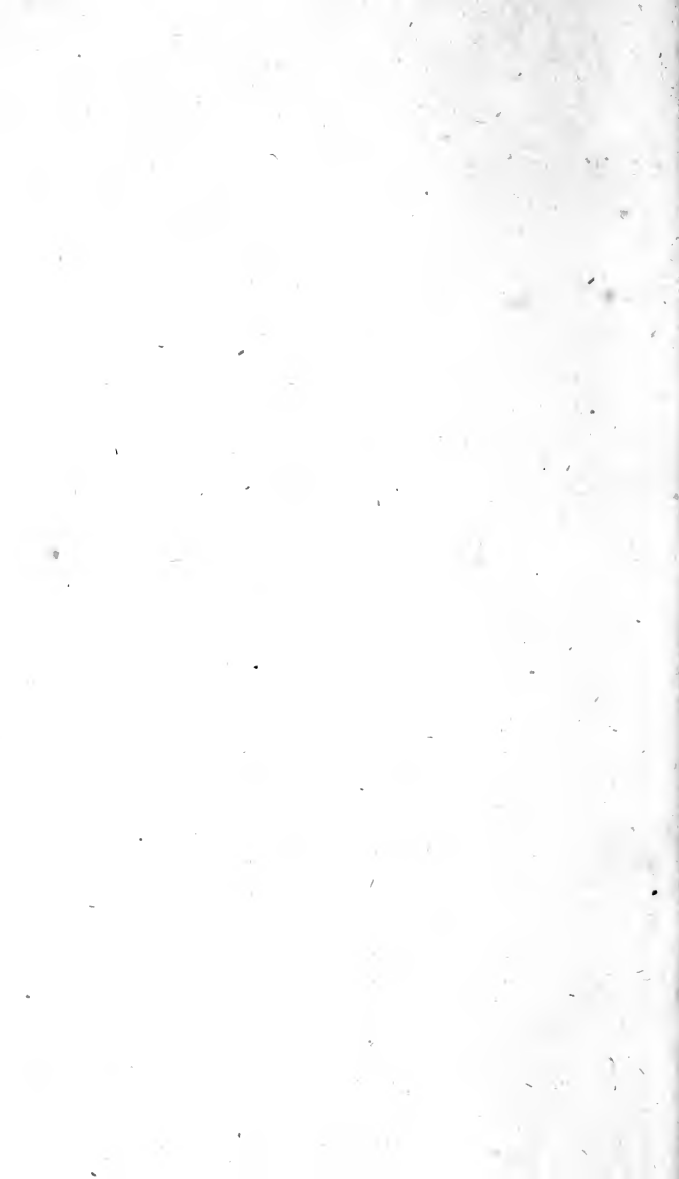
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